Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

SIVA the DESTROYER
by J.-J. des Ormeaux.

FEBRUARY-MARCH

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Everyone knows that his Auto runs better at night in the cool moist air. This VIX Invention is founded upon that principle and makes any Auto run that way all the time.

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Steve Hamilton, Ark., U. S. A., reports (sworn) 78 1-3 miles on 2 gals. in Pontiac Coupe with VIX.
The Royal Stables of the King of Spain, reports on His Royal Majesty's Packard Car a saving of 36 liters gas in 600 Kilometer run with VIX.
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Buick	28	Ford T	87	Nash	30	Reo	20
Cadillac	25	Ford A	61	Oakland	32	Roosevelt	26
Chevrolet	42	Franklin	24	Oldsmobile	43	Studebaker	32
Chrysler	31	Hudson	31	Packard	24	Stutz	14
De Soto	26	Hupmobile	34	Peerless	33% Gain	Whippet	35
Dodge	40	La Salle	13	Graham	26	Willys-Knight	34
Durant	34	Lincoln	14	Pierce-Arrow	25	Plymouth	30

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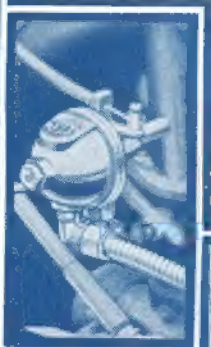

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"Jim!" she exclaimed..

So then I told Marge how the Hawaiian Guitar had made my ambitions all come true

I was just a plain discouraged "wash-out." No talent, no friends. No "social presence," no worth-while prospects at my job; no hard, solid cash salted away at the bank.

And then what could a girl see in me? No matter how much I thought about girls—the way I felt about Marge, for example—I couldn't do anything about it.

One night I tried reading a magazine. I began spinning the pages past my thumb.

And THEN It Happened!

Somehow one page flashed out from the rest. "Learn the Hawaiian Guitar at Home," it read. And it urged me to send for a free Book. That was three months ago.

Now let me tell you about the other night.

I asked Marge if I could call. She told me to come over after supper. Excited? I'll say I was!

Marge came out in a few minutes. I couldn't restrain myself any longer.

"Marge!" I cried. "I've got a surprise for you!" I reached down and lifted up my Guitar. Even in the semi-darkness I could see Marge's eyes grow big.

I played to her. Dreamy "Aloha"; throbbing "Carolina Moon"; all the blues of "Moanin' Low"—and two others. When I stopped, Marge didn't say a word for a full minute.

Then she exclaimed excitedly, "Jim! Why didn't you tell me before?"

I swallowed hard. "Because—" I began, "because, Marge—well, I guess there wasn't so very much to tell—'before.'

"why didn't you tell me that before?"

"But *now*," I rushed on—"I'm started for the biggest thing that ever was opened up to me! Listen, Marge! I've done it at home, without a teacher, by a wonderful new method.

"I took a trip over to Bridgeton one night and played my Guitar at the 'Y.' They went wild, Marge! Paid me *ten dollars* for it.

"Since then I've played at two dances there, too, and Johnny Farrell says I start with his orchestra the first of the month. Think of it! It will mean *doubling my salary!*"

Marge was quiet again. Then, looking at me with level eyes, she said—"Jim, you've found yourself. I didn't know it was in you. I'm so happy."

* * * * * *

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City and State.....

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XVII NUMBER 2

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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HERE is cheery news for the many thousands of admirers of H. P. Lovecraft's stories. A long story by Mr. Lovecraft, the first he has written since *The Dunwich Horror* (published in our issue of April, 1929), will be printed soon in this magazine. It is called *The Whisperer in Darkness,* and has an eldritch grip and eery fascination fully up to the high standard of the best that this gifted writer has produced. The horror grows and mounts, and its whispers of unthinkable things from Outside give the tale a power to chill the blood that is seldom met with, even in the stories in this magazine. We are particularly happy to announce the forthcoming appearance of *The Whisperer in Darkness,* since it is twenty-two months since any new stories from Mr. Lovecraft's masterly pen have appeared.

Beginning with this issue, WEIRD TALES will be published bi-monthly, instead of monthly as heretofore. As sixty days is too long a time to ask you to wait between installments of serials, all stories hereafter will be printed complete in one issue. Mr. Lovecraft's story, which had been intended as a two-part serial, will be given you complete in one issue.

The December issue seems to have made an especially fine impression. Frank Belknap Long, Jr., author of *The Horror from the Hills,* writes to the editor: "With *The Primeval Pit, Something From Above, The Master Fights,* and *The Boat on the Beach,* the December WEIRD TALES takes its place among the four or five best numbers since the inception of the magazine." Similar comment appears in a large number of the letters received.

"Donald Wandrei carries off first prize in the December issue with his story, *Something From Above,*" writes N. J. O'Neail, of Toronto, in a letter to the editor. "H. Warner Munn's *Tales of the Werewolf Clan* are absolute epics, and Seabury Quinn, always good, is better than usual in *The Wolf of St. Bonnot.* But where is H. P. Lovecraft? We haven't had anything from him for nearly two years, except two reprints (the best stories in their respective issues), and a few poems. I am far from belittling the latter; but I think the majority of readers want something much longer and more substantial. And also more W. T. reprints. My own vote would be for one every month; and I think most readers would at least agree on one in two months, instead of one in three, as at present."

"In the December issue," writes J. Vernon Shea, Jr., of Pittsburgh, "happily, was one of those excellent tales that come about once in four issues; *Burnt Things,* by Robert C. Sandison. He has given us a truly unique, shivery masterpiece. Nothing

(Please turn to page 150)

Six Senses" 5— to know life, the 6th to Master it!

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(Continued from page 148)

else in the magazine approaches it, not even the incomparable Jules de Grandin opus, or Donald Wandrei's latest, which, after a magnificent start, slowly petered into the science-fiction field. I have long been wondering why the best tales from W. T. are not brought out in book form. Certainly they deserve publication. Why don't you take a vote among the readers about the fifty best stories published in WEIRD TALES and publish them?"

Writes Thomas de V. Harper, of Klamath Falls, Oregon: "May an old reader say a word or two in commendation of your magazine? By 'old reader' I mean just that. I have never missed a copy of WEIRD TALES since Vol. 1, No. 1. I want to join the rest of the readers with the cry 'Keep WEIRD TALES weird.' I am especially partial to werewolf tales, good ghost stories, and stories dealing with the apparent truth of ancient superstitions, interplanetary stories, etc. Please stay away from the so-called 'scientific fiction' having to do with marvelous machines, fourth dimension stuff, vari-colored rays, etc. An occasional story of abnormal surgery is about enough of the 'scientific' sort of weird tale for this magazine. Seabury Quinn is undoubtedly the best writer on your staff. His stories are always interesting, well written, and hold the attention from the start. I just have one suggestion to make to Quinn: Some day, give us a story in which the inimitable Frenchman fails—fails miserably through overlooking some item that he should have known. It might be well, in order that the beautiful girl who usually figures in their adventures may come out of it well and happy, to have Trowbridge discover and correct de Grandin's oversight, thus giving the worthy Trowbridge something to remind de Grandin of in future when the Frenchman gets too cocky. As for Edmond Hamilton, I have noticed in the Eyrie one or two complaints about his stories of the Interstellar Patrol. I can't understand why. The Interstellar Patrol stories are to my notion the best interplanetary stories I have ever read. The usual story of this type is half a jumble of attempted scientific description of the craft, and then a throwing of the hero into a series of adventures on another planet. Hamilton, on the other hand, writes in a way that takes it for granted the reader knows all about the space-ships, the ordinary commerce between the worlds, and the action in his stories takes place most of the time out in space itself, with worlds, suns, and entire solar systems being swung out of their orbits and used in his plots. His style of writing is just right. I hope you have more stories by Edmond Hamilton, and I hope most of them are of the doings of our friends of the Interstellar Patrol. My vote as to the stories in the December issue goes to Seabury Quinn's *The Wolf of St. Bonnot. The Boat on the Beach,* by Kadra Maysi, gets my second place vote. I am glad you found Kadra Maysi. This story is a perfect ghost story, and is pretty and sweet, with nothing of the gruesome about it. I have read her work in another magazine, and it was good, but lately that magazine has not had much room for fiction and I have missed her. Please get her to write something more for you. Third place probably belongs to *Something from Above,* by Donald Wandrei."

Writes Henry S. Whitehead, author of *The Tree-Man* and other stories: "I wish to offer you heartiest and unreserved congratulations on the December issue of WEIRD TALES. I have read through practically every number since its inception,

(Please turn to page 152)

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F. J. Barsuglia, Jr., writes: "I am very well pleased with your little Corona and I must say I do not know what I would really do without it. It works like a charm and has every convenience of a larger machine."

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(Continued from page 150)

and this is the high point. There is not a weak spot nor what I think of as an 'amateur' effort in it from cover to cover. It is a corncracker. It is a honeycooler. It is the goods."

"Let us have more stories of demonology, witchcraft, superstitious folklore, and tales of lost cities, and stories of the *dark* Middle Ages," writes Albert J. Plahal, of Provincetown, Massachusetts. "These are the kind that make weirdness beyond comprehension."

Florie Fleetwood, of Portland, Oregon, writes to the Eyrie: "Please publish ghost stories with spirits going around doing queer things. Your December issue is the first of your magazines that I have read. Will the next one have some ghostly spirits making visitations, rattling chairs, tables, dishes and furniture, and other mysterious, weird and uncanny plots? *Men of Steel,* by Ainslee Jenkins, was splendid. The author didn't go quite far enough because I wanted to know what it was that changed the Indian into the steel. *Burnt Things,* by Robert C. Sandison, is another splendid one. All in all your magazine is really the best out."

E. Hoffmann Price writes from his home in New Orleans: "Whitehead's story in the January issue led them all by several lengths. It is the most outlandish thing I ever read, and wonderfully convincing, and splendidly written. Truly weird, and yet never a trace of the struggle to be weird. A difficult theme, yet developed without ever wearying the reader with the many necessary explanations. Be pleased to felicitate Doctor Whitehead on a truly excellent weird story, superlatively well conceived and executed. I'm very glad to see that Robert E. Howard got his justly deserved acclaim from the readers. *Kings of the Night* comes so close to my little private list of great stories that I might as well admit it to the circle; although to dub a story 'great' requires a good deal of careful study and analysis and contemplation, lest one fall into the cheapening of praise by loosely scattering one's superlatives. There is an epic sweep to some of Howard's King Kull and Brule the Spear-slayer stuff that makes you hanker for a horse and a battle-ax, and about forty stout men-at-arms to give you something to practise on."

"Thanks so much for giving us the charming and refreshing story called *The Uncharted Isle,*" writes Katherine M. Turner, of the University of the Philippines. "We people off here in the Orient live in more or less of an unreal world—that is, unreal in the ordinary American sense, though real enough to us—and we have no taste nor relish for the so-called 'realistic' stuff that is served up to us, sometimes hot and sometimes cold, in most of the magazines that come to us. We like imaginative stories, we like delicacy of touch, we like beauty. And in *The Uncharted Isle* we are glad to say we have found them all. I trust we may have more like it. I have been following Mr. Smith's stories and poems for some time and I have never failed to find in them that indefinable something that distinguishes an art from a craft."

A letter from Bill Ansten, of Anacortes, Washington, says: "One of the best stories you ever printed was *The Copper Bowl,* by Captain George Fielding Eliot. Let's have more like it. Some people don't like torture stories. If they don't they certainly are not compelled to read them. I like them and think you should put more

(Please turn to page 154)

"You folks must think I can't play!"

I cried, when they laughed at my offer

IT was the monthly get-together of our little group and the fun was at its height. Mabel had just finished singing a touching version of "Frankie and Johnnie" when I offered to play.

"Boys! This is going to be good! Did you folks hear that? Jim said *he'd play for us!*" cried Tom.

I pretended to be highly insulted. Drawing myself up with mock dignity, I said, "You folks must think I can't play! Why, the very idea!"

This caused a fresh explosion of laughter. "Can't play!" called someone. "Say, if I could play as well as you, I'd be digging ditches right now!"

Seating myself at the piano I held up my hand to command silence. Then, with a good many flourishes I opened "Swanee River," turned it upside down, and began to play.

And how! I traveled up and down that keyboard, with my one good finger, as Tom called it, until the crowd howled for mercy. Finally I turned around and demanded, "Now who says I can't play?"

"You win!" came from all sides. "Only please don't demonstrate any more, for the love of heaven!"

But instead of getting up from the piano, I suddenly swung into the haunting strains of "The Pagan Love Song." But with what a difference! This was not clowning, but real music. I played as I had always longed to—beautifully, effortlessly, with real skill and feeling.

No wonder the crowd could hardly believe their ears! The moment the piece was finished they overwhelmed me with questions. *Where had I learned to play? When had I studied? Who was my teacher? Why had I kept it a secret?*

How I Taught Myself to Play

I told them the whole story. Ever since I was a child, I had been crazy about music. But, like most children, I hated to practice. That's why, after a few desultory attempts, my music lessons were given up, and I had to content myself with hearing others play.

But every time I penped up a party with my one-finger clowning the longing to really play returned. However, I had no time now to take lessons and spend hours practicing, to say nothing of the expense of a private teacher. Then one day I happened to come across an ad of the U. S. School of Music

"Why, that's a correspondence school, isn't it?" interrupted Tom.

"Yes," I told him. "The ad offered a Free Demonstration Lesson to prove how easy it is to learn to play at home, without a teacher, in one's spare time. I sent for it.

"It was great. I decided to take the course I learned in my spare time, after work, and thoroughly enjoyed each lesson. For there are no long hours of practice—no tiresome scales—the U. S. School of Music way.

"Almost before I knew it, I was able to play all the pieces I had always longed to learn—jazz, classical anything. But I didn't want to tell you folks until I was sure of myself—you know, no clowning.

They were dumbfounded. But in a moment they eagerly demanded piece after piece—dance music, ballads, snappy songs. Now I'm never invited anywhere that I'm not practically forced to entertain with my music. As Tom says, learning to *really play* has certainly made me popular!

No Talent Needed

This story is typical. People who once didn't know one note from another are good players today—thanks to the U. S. School of Music

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(Continued from page 152)

of them in WEIRD TALES. And let's have more stories by Gaston Leroux. WEIRD TALES and ORIENTAL STORIES are two of the three best magazines there are."

"I like all the stories in your latest issue," writes A. G. Seager, of Toronto, "but Seabury Quinn's Doctor de Grandin is, I think, the peer of them all. This author must be a medical man, as his references seem to be authentic and plausible."

A letter from George Wilson, of Milwaukee, says: "One day about a year and a half ago I sat in my car waiting for some one. I noticed a drug store on the corner, and knowing that I had to wait for some time I wanted to get a magazine. In the drug store I was attracted by your red cover and especially by the picture. Well, on opening it up I read a few lines at random in that first story, *The House of Golden Masks*. I decided that was the magazine for me, so I bought it. Since that time I haven't missed a copy, for I am always looking for another Seabury Quinn masterpiece. Although his stories are all good, that is the best story I have read in quite a while. *The Lost Lady* is the next best, in my opinion."

Clark Ashton Smith writes from his home in California: "The January issue of WEIRD TALES is quite distinguished, containing as it does the first part of Long's remarkable *Horror from the Hills,* and *The Passing of a God,* by Henry S. Whitehead. Both are more than memorable. *The Passing of a God* is one of the most sheerly original tales I have ever seen in your pages. The idea was one that required careful handling—only a good writer could have done it acceptably."

"I read the story, *Kings of the Night,* by Robert E. Howard in your November issue," writes B. M. Bailey, and wish to say that outside of *The Shadow Kingdom* by the same author, I think it the best story I have ever read in your magazine. Howard is my favorite author, along with Edgar Rice Burroughs. I also enjoy Seabury Quinn's stories greatly. Please give us some more tales of King Kull and of Valusia. In my opinion WEIRD TALES and ORIENTAL STORIES are the two best magazines published."

A letter from J. Wasso, Jr., of Pen Argyle, Pennsylvania, asks: "Does the appearance of ORIENTAL STORIES mean that we will no longer read the beautiful orientales of Frank Owen, E. Hoffmann Price and others in WEIRD TALES? If so, then the publication of ORIENTAL STORIES is a tragedy, not a blessing. Why should the readers of WEIRD TALES be deprived of these exquisite Oriental gems of literature, just because there exists a magazine by the name of ORIENTAL STORIES?" [No, the readers of this magazine will not be deprived of orientales such as we have published in the past. The sister magazine, ORIENTAL STORIES, will publish stories of a different type from those in WEIRD TALES, and will lean heavily on realistic adventure tales of the Orient.—THE EDITORS.]

A letter from Dale Rogers, of Detroit, says: "Because a certain party does not care for interplanetary stories is no reason why they should be eliminated. There are many others, I am sure, who do care for them. If this type of story is not weird, then please tell me what is weird. This is the one kind of story I enjoy reading most. I do not care for the common so-called science stories being published today. But it is in WEIRD TALES that I find the cream of scientific and interplanetary fiction. Edmond Hamilton ranks supreme in this class of writing."

(Please turn to page 156)

"DISABLES ATTACKERS WITHOUT INJURY"

MAKE YOUR VEST-POCKET BRING YOU $400.00 A MONTH

ATLAS TEAR GAS FOUNTAIN PEN GUN

LATEST MODEL

BRAND NEW

An article that arouses instant curiosity. Quickly demonstrated and conveniently carried in vest pocket. Protection for everybody against robbers, criminals, morons, vicious dogs, etc., yet it is not classed as a weapon, because absolutely harmless.

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writes Hansen of Northern Illinois. Hayes of Minn. wires, "Sold my first dozen in 5 hours. Send 3 doz. C. O. D. at once." Agents make $2.55 on each sale. Big extra profits on quantity. Prospects everywhere—men, women, banks, theatres, merchants, etc. You should close at least 40%.

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You won't have to go hunting for prospects with this article. You'll find them by the thousands EVERYWHERE. Wherever people gather. Simply Show It. Show it to your barber—your banker—your dealer—your doctor—your dentist—your minister. Show it to friends, acquaintances, clerks—to everybody—both men and women. Everyone will be interested. And that means sales—sales and still more sales.

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No carrying case to lug around or to bother with. Just a sample Atlas Tear Gas Fountain Pen clipped to your vest pocket—just like an ordinary fountain pen; you can show it in a second—in a flash! Simply hand it to a person with the statement "What do you think of this?"—and instantaneously you have created a prospect. You are going to find the Atlas Tear Gas Fountain Pen the fastest seller you ever handled.

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A simple, quick demonstration never fails to arouse vital interest and a keen desire to possess. The "Cigarette Test" is amazingly effective. Only requires a few seconds' time, yet proves beyond all doubt what a tremendously effective weapon the ATLAS IS, without the least bit of harm, injury or danger. If you believe in effective, startling demonstration to close sales, then you have in the Atlas Tear Gas Fountain Pen Gun a 100% seller.

New—Different—Amazing

The Atlas Tear Gas Fountain Pen Gun has already proven itself an amazing seller. Nothing in the direct sales field today actually compares with it as a SELF SELLER. Without exception every person will look at it! Ninety five per cent will want to examine it. Kindles instant curiosity. That's the kind of an article smart salesmen want to handle. Quick interest means quick sales—and nothing will catch your prospect's eye *QUICKER* than this astounding device.

TWO TEAR GAS CARTRIDGES FREE with every gun. You make 20 cents each on every extra cartridge sold.

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still open. Especially attractive proposition to men controlling force of salesmen. Send coupon for details regarding How to get Free Demonstrator.

Send for Your Demonstrator Today!

ATLAS TEAR GAS CO.

Chesterfield Station Dept. 84 Chicago, Ill.

GET THE FACTS REGARDING THE OFFER OF **FREE DEMONSTRATOR**

EXCLUSIVE SPECIAL FEATURE

Unlike other tear gas fountain pens the ATLAS **does not discharge with a loud noise like a revolver.** This feature above makes the ATLAS the preferred type. The loud explosive discharge discourages use by both men and women. This "silent" feature of the ATLAS makes it the biggest fountain pen tear gas gun seller in the world.

Mail Coupon for Details!

Atlas Tear Gas Co., Chicago, Ill.
Chesterfield Station, Dept. 84.

Gentlemen —Please send me particulars regarding your Fountain Pen Tear Gas Gun agency. Also tell me how I can get a Demonstrator and two cartridges Free.

Name _____

Town _____

St. or R. F. D. _____ State _____

(Continued from page 154)

Bernard E. Schiffmann, of New York City, writes to the Eyrie: "I am proud to list among my friends a Mr. W., one of the best known authorities on radio in New York City. While visiting at his luxurious apartment in the East Fifties I noticed a copy of WEIRD TALES on his table. Seeing it, I remarked that I was surprized to see a man in his line of business reading WEIRD TALES. He immediately sat up and in that loud booming voice of his said, 'Surprized, are you? Well, I read it, and not only does it relieve my mind of the tedious problems of the day, but I get an honest kick out of the stories as well.' Well, so did I, I informed him, and we immediately launched into a discussion of WEIRD TALES, the only non-boring, non-monotonous magazine in the field."

"I would rather read WEIRD TALES than eat or sleep," writes Yvonne Browne, of Anacortes, Washington. "The person who wrote to the Eyrie saying he didn't like the queer French names in Seabury Quinn's stories and that WEIRD TALES weren't so weird as they were crazy makes me like to tell him personally what I think. He is the one that's crazy."

"The December issue of WEIRD TALES was certainly chock-full of good stories," writes Jack Darrow, of Chicago. "I picked out *Something from Above*, by Donald Wandrei, as the best story in that issue. It is the weirdest story I have read since *The Space-Eaters*, by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. I wonder how the latter author's serial is going to be. *The Wolf of St. Bonnot*, by Seabury Quinn, was another excellent story. If it wasn't for *Something From Above* it would have taken first place."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the December issue as shown by your votes was *Something From Above*, by Donald Wandrei. *The Wolf of St. Bonnot*, by Seabury Quinn, was a close second. In the January issue, Seabury Quinn's fascinating tale of Jules de Grandin, *The Lost Lady*, easily led all other stories in popularity.

My Favorite Stories in the February-March Weird Tales Are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why? ----------

(2)---------- ----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

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GIVEN FREE

12 THRILLING DETECTIVE ADVENTURES

If You Act Now!

HERE THEY ARE

1. **The Valley of Missing Men**—Read how Parkinson discovered this baffling mystery—a story pulsating with hair-raising incidents.
2. **Buff**—A cub reporter and a death mystery—a story that works up to a crashing climax
3. **The Triangle of Terror**—A gooseflesh story that will send the cold shivers up your spine.
4. **Crimson Poppies**—Dr. Howes evolves a fiendish plot to inherit the wealth of a lunatic millionaire.
5. **The Sign of the Toad**—An eerie detective story, full of exciting situations and mysterious deaths.
6. **The Mystery at Eagle Lodge**—Soul-gripping, fascinating, tense, full of action—You will move in the land of make-believe with a touch of the unreal.
7. **The Web**—This tale threads the sinister net that was torn asunder by the murder of James Blake.
8. **The Glass Eye**—The convict worked out a clever and diabolical scheme, but a dead man's eye betrayed him.
9. **Ten Dangerous Hours**—Bristling with excitement and full of surprises—a remarkable story with thrills galore.
10. **Disappearing Bullets**—Crammed with blood-curdling action and strange happenings in the underworld — master-mind crooks and criminals.
11. **The Green-Eyed Monster**—A thrilling book, replete with startling climaxes and bristling with action
12. **Dearing-Do**—A vivid tale of Chinamen, opium traffic, the secret service, and desperate fighting

READ how Experience Smith, master detective, solved the baffling mystery of "Disappearing Bullets"—a swift-action story with dramatic situations. Each one an exciting detective story. These novels formerly sold for the regular price of $1.00 per set. Now, for a limited time only, we are giving them away **absolutely free** with a year's subscription to ORIENTAL STORIES, the latest magazine of thrilling mystery adventure stories.

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ORIENTAL STORIES is rapidly growing in circulation because of its fascinating stories of the East. The Orient makes a romantic appeal to the imagination that no other part of the world can equal. The inscrutable mystery of Tibet, the veiled allure of Oriental harems, the charge of fierce Arab tribesmen, the singing of almond-eyed maidens under a Japanese moon, the whirling of dervishes, the barbaric splendor of mediæval sultans, the ageless life of Egypt—from all these the story-writers weave charms to shut out the humdrum world of everyday life, and transport the reader into a fairyland of imagination, but a fairyland that exists in its full reality in Asia. Simply send $1.50, the regular yearly subscription price for ORIENTAL STORIES, and the 12 Detective Story Novels will be sent to you without cost. A $2.50 value for $1.50. You receive the magazine for one year and the novels free of charge. The supply of novels is limited, so hurry.

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THE SONG OF A MAD MINSTREL

***By* ROBERT E. HOWARD**

I am the thorn in the foot, I am the blur in the sight;
I am the worm at the root, I am the thief in the night.
I am the rat in the wall, the leper that leers at the gate;
I am the ghost in the hall, herald of horror and hate.

I am the rust on the corn, I am the smut on the wheat,
Laughing man's labor to scorn, weaving a web for his feet.
I am canker and mildew and blight, danger and death and decay;
The rot of the rain by night, the blast of the sun by day.

I warp and wither with drouth, I work in the swamp's foul yeast;
I bring the black plague from the south and the leprosy in from the east.
I rend from the hemlock boughs wine steeped in the petals of dooms;
Where the fat black serpents drowse I gather the Upas blooms.

I have plumbed the northern ice for a spell like frozen lead;
In lost gray fields of rice, I have learned from Mongol dead.
Where a bleak black mountain stands I have looted grisly caves;
I have digged in the desert sands to plunder terrible graves.

Never the sun goes forth, never the moon glows red,
But out of the south or the north, I come with the slavering dead.
I come with hideous spells, black chants and ghastly tunes;
I have looted the hidden hells and plundered the lost black moons.

There was never a king or priest to cheer me by word or look,
There was never a man or beast in the blood-black ways I took.
There were crimson gulfs unplumbed, there were black wings over a sea;
There were pits where mad things drummed, and foaming blasphemy.

There were vast ungodly tombs where slimy monsters dreamed;
There were clouds like blood-drenched plumes where unborn demons screamed.
There were ages dead to Time, and lands lost out of Space;
There were adders in the slime, and a dim unholy Face.

Oh, the heart in my breast turned stone, and the brain froze in my skull—
But I won through, I alone, and I poured my chalice full
Of horrors and dooms and spells, black buds and bitter roots—
From the hells beneath the hells, I bring you my deathly fruits.

MEANWHILE

In between issues of WEIRD TALES we suggest that you read—

Edited by FARNSWORTH WRIGHT
Editor of WEIRD TALES

An amazing array of fine stories appears in the issue that is now on sale at the news stands. Among the marvelous tales included in the current issue are:

RED BLADES OF BLACK CATHAY, by Tevis Clyde Smith and Robert E. Howard. A tale of Genghis Khan, a red-blooded story of vivid action in the kingdom that stood in the road of the Mongol horde's sweep to the south.

THE SECRET TRAIL, by G. G. Pendarves. A vivid and romantic story of the slave traffic of the Zawa Arabs, and a white girl who was carried captive along the bitter slave trail to Kano.

WILLIAM, by S. B. H. Hurst. His adventurous exploits when "absent without leave" from His Majesty's Army in India were spectacular and thrilling, but his last exploit was the most astonishing of all.

SCOUNDRELS BY NIGHT, by Richard Kent. A vivid tale of Java, two rascally white men, and the tropical beauty of Sumatra Sue, the tavern-keeper in Weltevreden.

THE KALGAN ROAD, by William Doughty. A swift-moving story of Mongolia and an American who kidnapped the Living Buddha from the city of Urga.

THE MERCHANT OF BASRA, by Dudley Hoys. They called him "the Maggot," but he overreached himself when he tried to sell his daughter as a wife to Muchaidle Nafa.

THE DRAGOMAN'S REVENGE, by Otis Adelbert Kline. Another tale of Hamed the Attar—how he was condemned to death for a murder he did not commit.

THE RAJAH'S GRANDMOTHER, by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. A gripping tale of the Secret Service in India.

FOR THE SAKE OF ENLIGHTENMENT, by Coutts Brisbane. There are quack doctors even in China as this amusing story about Dr Fung Lee shows.

THE SLAVE OF JUSTICE, by E. Hoffmann Price. The story of a minor Asiatic potentate who had to pass judgment of death on his own son.

DELLA WU, CHINESE COURTEZAN, by Frank Owen. A tender and beautiful tale of Old China and the revenge of Nen-Tsang.

Where, except in the Orient, can such marvelous settings be found for fascinating stories? You will find some of your favorite WEIRD TALES authors listed above. We know you will be enthusiastic over this magazine.

ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS

"I seemed to be spinning through space, mounting through infinite leagues, whirling, rushing."

Siva The Destroyer

By J.-J. DES ORMEAUX

A novelette of super-science and a death-conflict with a genius who threatened the world

TWELVE thousand feet up, automatic controls set for the vicinity of the Channel ports, I hummed along in my tiny Bat-type monoplane, watching in a sort of semi-doze the undulating white thread below me that was the surf breaking along the coast of Spain.

Below me were scores of other craft, triplanes, tandem biplanes, lazily moving dirigibles, gaudily painted pleasure ships, tiny one-man helicopters that spun like gauze-winged insects in the sun.

The stuttering flash of my receiver broke in on my wool-gathering.

Stanage . . . Detective-Captain Stanage . . . N20 . . . N20 . . . N20. . . .

That was my code signal at Detective quarters, American Zone.

I threw in my key, answering: *Stanage . . . N20 . . . vicinity Cadiz. . . .*

The message flashed back:

Pick up Blue Express at once between I-361 and Gibraltar . . . received message ten minutes back unknown source Blue Express to be destroyed before reaches

Mediterranean ports . . . may be crank calls self Siva the Destroyer . . . take no chances but cover . . . am reaching others in vicinity. . . .

I repeated the message, flashed off my key, released the automatic control switch and banked in a steep arc landward.

The extreme end of Spain seemed to wheel below me; Gibraltar, the Rock standing up like a bald head; across the narrow strait the tiny white roofs of Tangiers in Morocco; to my left the Mediterranean, to my right the gray Atlantic. I shot out over that gray watery waste, my Bat climbing into full speed, the air even in the enclosed cockpit humming and quivering. Few other craft were over the sea; some freighters lumbering along the lanes from London to Rio, a few pleasure dirigibles skirting the shore. I

kept my eyes on that quadrant of horizon where I-361 would appear. That was the last of the ilots, or huge floating landing-stages, that intervened in the ocean before the Spanish coast. I passed my hand over the breech of the two automatic turret-guns that poked their long noses out along the snout of my Bat. What madman was this that was threatening the destruction of the Blue Express? These two guns I had my hand on, manufactured for Universal Police Bats, could penetrate with their explosive bullets six-inch armor plate, at a mile's distance, and blow a hole big enough to pass a body through. Three or four more craft armed like mine would be even now speeding toward the Blue Express. Did some one want to fight a duel with us? It was preposterous. It must be, as the message had said, some crank.

In five minutes I had picked up ilot I-361, floating like a child's toy on the surface of the water. By the time I could make out the hotel roofs and terraces on it the Blue Express was above it, a blue-green cigar hurtling with all the power of its multiple engines toward the European coast. I climbed steeply, reduced the engine, circled in a great curve above the Express, whipping smoke messages in the International Code from my rudder discharge. They answered, saying they had met no one. Obviously the skipper had not received the message I had.

I scanned the horizon on every side. It was empty. The air was cloudless, tranquil, blue, the sea sun-dappled. It was unthinkable that anywhere in that serenity destruction could be waiting for the Blue Express. It was absurd. Whoever had given that message was the sort of person who turns in a fire alarm to see the engines run.

And then, in the midst of all that tranquillity, a bolt from the blue, it happened.

Fire streaked from the air to the left of the Blue Express. It was a flash out of pure air, out of empty space. The whole front end of the dirigible collapsed like a smashed paper bag; the rest sagged heavily downward; from the shattered undercar people fell like plummets into the sea.

For an instant I was too stunned to make the slightest retaliatory movement. And in that frozen moment, while the huge bag swung slowly around at an angle of forty-five degrees, another burst of flame came from the air, from another position. It riddled the compartments that still clung to the exposed belly of the bag with a direct and murderous fire. With a roar that rocked my Bat from stem to stern the remnant of the dirigible exploded. It burst like a titanic rocket, spreading out on all sides like a star-shell; the air rained pieces of material, fragments of twisted metal, human bodies; heavier masses pitched in spinning parabolas into the sea.

Control came back to me in a shock of action.

I dove in a headlong swoop at the position of those flashes, my guns splitting the air ahead in knives of flame. It was a dive that nearly tore the Bat apart; the whole mechanism vibrated and screamed. Those flashes were gun flashes, those bullets were explosive bullets! *But it was a ship I could not see!* At the bottom of that swoop where the flashes had been was absolute nothingness. But as I flattened out I glimpsed those jets of flame leaping from the left and this time spurting at me.

He had missed. He was above me and in a moment would have me; I shoved the screaming Bat into a mad loop, fighting for upper position, the throttle jammed forward at maximum. Up, up, I roared, and the jets followed, to the right, to the side, behind me; with one moment more and the help of Jehovah I

would be top dog. Even in that wild zooming instant I knew one thing: whatever this was it was slower than a Bat and its guns were of smaller caliber. I spun into the first movement of a spiral and riddled the air where the jets had been. There was no answer. I raked the whole segment of space where we had climbed. Still nothing. Then it flashed on me what he was doing. He had stopped firing until he was in position to finish me.

Even as the thought leaped into my mind the jets opened from six hundred feet to my left, on an absolute dead level with me. I dove instinctively, reflexively; there was a shock from behind that knocked the ship sideways like a ball struck by a hand. Through fifty feet of space the Bat slewed; I clawed for purchase in that reeling cockpit; one glance back was enough to show half the tail ripped away; a bullet had struck the extreme end of my rudder. The helicoptic devices that set in the minute the Bat stopped forward direction were partially destroyed; the ship was diving in short dips, staggering, righting itself, reeling crazily. I threw up the quadruplex hood, trying to crawl out on the wing; behind me the tail was afire; flames singed my face. I made the wing edge; the ship lunged; I half fell, half dove into space.

When the parachute plucked me out of my hurtling fall I was staring at death, if I ever looked at him before. I swung in midair a perfect target, the great bloom of silk above me, sinking gently toward the sea. Overhead the Bat still careened drunkenly, a mass of yellow flame. Below launches from the ilot were streaking toward pieces of wreckage that dotted the sea. In the comparative silence came the roar of a motor to my left. *His* motor, banking. I realized with a start that the sound was receding. A faint streak of smoke was going off to the west, like an insolent signal. He was going. The sound died. He was gone.

I struck the water twenty feet from one of the launches. They poled me in; some one hacked the parachute harness free. We shot toward the ilot in two spouting crests of spray.

When we came up in the elevator to the floor of the ilot I thrust my way through the excited throng that crowded there, making for the nearest hotel. Inside I made immediate wireless telephone connections with Severill, my chief, the man who had radioed me the message.

I told him quickly what had happened.

I heard his astounded exclamation. "This is impossible, Stanage!" he said. "This is incredible!"

"But it's true. He wrecked the Blue Express. He wrecked me."

"An invisible ship? An invisible pilot? Are you sure it wasn't some sort of remote control?"

"I know it wasn't," I said. "He was there. I heard him. I saw his guns flash. I've got a hunch it's a plain ordinary pursuit plane on the order of a Bat. But no rocket motors. He couldn't use them because the tail flames would have rendered his position clear."

He said: "I didn't tell you all the message we received. Part of the warning said the reason the Blue Express would be destroyed was because Hanishaw was traveling on it."

"Hanishaw!" I said. That was the renowned physicist, one of the celebrated triad who were working to break down the atom.

"Yes, and good Lord, man, here's the important part: we've just got word from Cairo that Doctor Khalid Bey has been warned from the same source!"

Khalid Bey was the second member of the triad.

"He has?" I said. "When was this? Is he alive still?"

"Yes, at the present moment."

I said: "What is this, a conspiracy to kill off the greatest scientists alive?"

"It looks like it," he said. "You'd better get to Khalid Bey at once."

I sprang out of the booth across the lobby for the roof elevators. In two minutes I could get the inter-ilot local that intercepted the Marseilles Express in the second air-lane. My dazed mind was still framing impossible questions. Who could this be? How had it been done? What was the object of an attack on Hanishaw, a man who had no enemies, a man who had devoted his life to disinterested physical research? Or on Doctor Khalid Bey, the wealthy amateur, who was said to scarcely venture out of his laboratory? Why slaughter hundreds of people just to kill one unsuspecting man, when he might have been lured to his death a hundred easier ways? Was it just a careless gesture of power? Was it some marauder from another world? But that was impossible. It was some one earthly, I was sure of that. Whoever Siva the Destroyer was, he had flesh and blood and a human mind, and there were mortal motives behind him.

As we transferred by lateral elevator from the local to the Express a young chap alongside me began some conversation about the afternoon's incident. I paid no special attention until I heard him mention the triad.

"What's that about the triad?" I said.

"I was saying we ought to get those three great men to work on this," he said.

"We will if they live," I said. "This looks like a direct attempt to kill them off. Hanishaw was on the Blue Express this afternoon. Khalid Bey's already been warned."

"Doctor Khalid Bey!" he exclaimed. "Why, I'm on my way to see him now!"

I looked at him. He was a keen-faced youngster, obviously fresh from a science doctorate; on the card tagged to his grip it said Charles Van West.

"What's that?" I said. "In what connection are you going to see Khalid Bey?"

"I've been given the chance to work in his laboratory as an assistant." Pride and anxiety struggled in his face. "I—it's a great chance—I—I hope——"

I finished his sentence more grimly. "I hope so too, Mr. Van West. I hope very much he's alive to receive you."

On the express deck of the super-city airdrome at Marseilles a sergeant of Universal Police picked me out of the disembarking throng.

"I've got a ship for you, sir," he said. "I was ordered to pick you up here."

"Good," I said. "Khalid Bey's laboratories in Cairo. All the speed you can possibly make."

As we sprinted across to his Bat the huge audiphones were already giving a detailed account of the catastrophe. I caught the words: ". . . *and Detective Captain Stanage of the Universal Police is supposed to have been killed in a desperate* . . ." That was one mistake I was glad they had made.

We shot out over the Mediterranean. The sergeant cut in his emergency tanks of benzine and liquid air; we rocketed through space with a terrific roar, two tails of fire going out behind us like a double-headed comet. The effect inside was deadening; my head felt like an apparatus of plaster and lead. After an incalculable interval, in which the sense of time, space and motion seemed to disappear completely, the yellow outlines of the African coast were dimly visible. We picked up the sprawling mass of Alexandria, cut by the glittering thread of the Mahmudiyeh Canal; beyond rolling wastes of sand, and the

flat silver ribbon of the Nile. In ten minutes we were circling over the palms and round mosques of Cairo.

We dropped perpendicularly down upon the roof landing-fin of Doctor Khalid Bey's laboratory. An assistant conducted me at once to where the scientist was waiting, in a small room beyond which came the hum of enormous turbo-generators. He was a tall man with flashing, brilliant eyes, incessantly smoking cigarettes; the strain he was under showed in the nervous rapidity of his movements. He spoke with a marked accent; although English had been the universal language for a quarter of a century, he was one of those who still used his native tongue.

"I had thought this was a hoax," he said, "until this terrible news about Hanishaw and the Blue Express. He was coming to see me; I almost feel responsible. This is something frightful. Apparently I have until midnight, if I can believe the warning."

"Your warning said you had until midnight?"

"Yes. Let me show it to you." He took from a table a folded sheet of paper. It was ordinary bond paper, without watermark, and upon it was a large drawing. It was a picture of Siva, the many-handed Hindoo god, done in red crayon with deft, sharp strokes. Below was the single sentence: *You shall perish tonight at midnight by the invisible hands of Siva the Destroyer.*

There was nothing else on the sheet. The printing was angular and strong, with no effort to conceal the natural boldness of the hand.

I stared at the ominous many-handed likeness of the god.

"How did this come to you, Doctor?" I asked.

"By ordinary mail. I had the envelope, but I threw it away, not knowing of course it would be of importance later. Every one of any prominence gets freakish letters from time to time. I don't even remember the postmark. It was addressed in the same hand, I believe."

"There's been no disturbance of any sort since you got it?"

"None."

"Is there any reason why you should be picked out for an attack of this sort?"

"None I know of. Every man has his enemies, but I certainly have none so virulent as this. And besides, it doesn't look like a personal enemy. Hanishaw and I had no connection except scientifically, and yet he was picked out by the same hand. It looks like something more wholesale."

"Is there anything you might have discovered in your experiments that some one might want kept concealed?"

He considered, his sharp face, like a bronze hawk's, resting on his hand. "There are certain things we have kept secret, but nothing any one would want to kill us for, surely. It wouldn't be of the slightest advantage to any one."

I shook my head. "It seems to be entirely without a motive," I said.

He flashed his brilliant eyes at me. "Unless it is a demonstration of power."

"I had the same idea," I said, "but still it looks incomprehensible. Why wasn't the ilot destroyed? Why was I spared?"

He shook his head in his turn. "I have been thinking about getting away," he said, tapping his long cigarette with a quick gesture. "I have a testing-station in the Sahara whose position I have kept secret for government reasons. I have packed and I intend to leave for it at nightfall."

"Hadn't you better let us protect you?" I asked.

He smiled wryly. "With all respect to your powers—I don't see what you could do. I think hiding is better. Perhaps you had better concentrate on Ferrand."

Doctor Ferrand, of Marseilles, was the third member of the triad.

"Has Ferrand been warned?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I was just going to get in touch with him." He turned toward the televisor at the side of the room. Just then the indicator emitted a green light, showing that some one was trying to reach him by it. With a slight exclamation he switched on the controls.

The receiving screen leaped into bright light, but no image appeared on it. Instead an enormous booming voice filled the room.

"I am asking for Captain Stanage," it said.

I stood up with a movement of surprize. "I am Captain Stanage," I said. I stepped quickly before the scanner. "Who is this?"

Still no image appeared on the screen.

"I am Siva the Destroyer," it said.

My body stiffened, my head shot forward; I could feel the short hair stand on the back of my neck.

"You have thrown down the gauntlet, Captain Stanage," said the voice, "and I have picked it up. I have added you to my list."

No words came from my mouth. Doctor Khalid Bey stood rigid, his lips moving in something like involuntary prayer.

"Doctor Khalid Bey is safe for the present," said the voice. "Just now I will race you to Doctor Ferrand."

The release dials clicked, the screen flashed dark, the booming voice was gone.

Khalid Bey said in a hoarse voice: "He will race you to Doctor Ferrand!"

I had already sprung toward the door. Midway I swung on my heel, crying: "But you! How about you!"

"I will take care of myself!" he cried. "Get to Ferrand!"

ONCE more the Bat roared over the Mediterranean, shrieking like a live thing, annihilating space. The sea fled beneath us, slower ships seemed to stand still; when we came in sight of the swarm of craft over Marseilles we missed collision a score of times; there was no way to warn them; we were traveling faster than sound. Above the small villa of Doctor Ferrand outside Marseilles we dropped like a projectile toward the ground. Would we be in time? Was he still alive? The scene below was tranquillity itself; the sea lapped peacefully inside the sheltered cove where the tiny villa stood.

All was quiet—had we won the race?

I plunged headlong over the open ground toward the house, leaving the sergeant to maneuver the Bat behind shelter. No sound came from within. I flung the door open, rushed into the domed sun-room. It was empty. A small door led off to the left. It was partly open.

I rushed through it shouting hoarsely: "Ferrand! Ferrand!" I came up short with a terrible shock in the pit of my stomach.

It was the scientist's study. In the chair behind his desk he lay, his body thrown back, his head nearly severed from his body.

As my eyes rose slowly from him the flesh froze over my body.

On the wall behind him a huge picture of Siva was being drawn stroke by stroke by an invisible hand!

I think I must have been nearer stark unreason then than I ever was in my life. My mind was blank; the contraction of my muscles held me as in a vise. With a noise between a gasp and a curse I dragged at my revolver, staggered a step forward, fired at that horrible space.

I had missed—*the picture went on being drawn.*

I threw myself forward desperately, firing a solid stream, emptying all the chambers of my revolver. There was a crash; I plunged blindly; I tripped over something and went headlong on the floor. I threw myself around, clawing wildly; my hands were on something; I fought at it, grasped it, pinned it. It was a body. It was still. A slow welter of blood ran through the air and flowed over my hands.

I got panting to my feet. The blood increased over a surface about the size of a man's chest. I leaned forward, exploring with my hands this thing below me. What I felt was a smooth surface, a series of smooth surfaces, like plates of some thin metal jointed together to form an armor. The outline was that of a man.

I wheeled to the table and picked up a strong sharp paper-knife. I bent down and felt for the ridge of one of the plates, inserting the blade in the interstice. The joint parted with the tenuous brittleness of aluminum. I ripped off the plate. It was as flexible as cardboard in my hand.

Beneath was human flesh.

It was burned. It was seared. It was charred black in places. I worked feverishly, rending off the plates, exposing a whole human body. A man's body. It was burned in great spreading sears beyond recognition.

I stood motionless staring at that corpse. My staggered mind was saying: Is this Siva? Have I killed him? Is it possible?

The sergeant was in the room. "Great God!" he cried. "What's this?"

I swung on him, snapping: "Get Marseilles headquarters at once. Tell them to bring a laboratory expert and a doctor."

While he made connections I went through the rest of the house. It was empty. Obviously Doctor Ferrand lived alone.

I returned to the study and gathered the invisible plates together. I wrapped them loosely in a small rug. I was fearful of handling them after the effects I had seen on their wearer. They had no temperature to my touch, nor did my hands as yet exhibit any burns. While I was collecting the plates I came on the weapon with which Doctor Ferrand had been murdered. It was a sharp heavy knife, invisible but for the smear of blood on its blade. By scraping it with my penknife I found it was plated with the same material.

I stepped over and examined the seared body closely. It had no identifying marks; it was a white man, roughly thirty years old, the features too wealed with burns to tell anything about the countenance. The skin even where it was not burned had a scarified look, inflamed and raw.

The sergeant came back. I took him by the arm at a sudden idea. "The plane must be here somewhere," I said. "Come outside and we'll look."

We ran outside and hunted over the ground around the villa. We were still hunting when the headquarters men arrived. I left three or four to go on with the search and went inside with the others.

Their chief came up short at the sight of the scarified body.

"Siva!" he cried. "You've killed him! You've got him!"

"I'm not so sure," I said.

"What!" he said. "You don't think this is Siva?"

It wasn't clear in my own mind why I had any doubts.

"I'll be surer when we find the plane," I said.

While the doctor took over the bodies we went out to resume the search. We hunted everywhere. We combed the property. Nothing could have escaped us. The plane was not there.

We returned to the house. The doctor had completed his examination. "These are strange burns," he said. "They are unlike any I have ever seen. Although they destroy a great area of tissue they seem superficial and have obviously healed and rehealed several times."

"Through several exposures to the substance," I hazarded. "As though he had put the suit on and off several times."

"It might be," he said.

I looked at the body. "I am sure this is not Siva," I said.

The chief stared at me. "But it must be! Who else could it be?"

"I don't know," I said, "but this man must have come in the plane and the plane is gone. Some one brought him in it. Some one took it away."

"What!" he cried. "Another invisible man?"

"Why not?" I said. "Perhaps three or four. Perhaps more. Creatures of Siva."

"Creatures of Siva?"

"Do you think he would trust himself inside that armor, when it burns the flesh the way it does?" I asked. "Not at all. The effect must be rapidly fatal. He gets others to do it for him. When we find Siva he will not be behind any invisible plates."

I turned to the laboratory expert.

"Can you make anything of those plates?"

He shook his head. "I will have to take them to the laboratory for analysis. They are something unknown to me. It seems like a sort of metal."

"How long will that take?"

He shrugged. "It depends on what success we have. Some hours."

"We will have to wait on that," I said.

I NEEDED time to think. My brain was a maze of confused thoughts. After we had dropped the expert at the laboratory I had the sergeant leave me at the Palladium Hotel, where I took a room to pass the time until the laboratory reported. I needed quiet to work things out. The sergeant said he would refuel the Bat and leave it at the hotel for my use.

I had been inside but a few minutes when I remembered Doctor Khalid Bey. The succession of events had put him completely out of my mind.

I made connections with him immediately. He was still at the laboratory. He had been informed, of course, of the events at Doctor Ferrand's house, and his voice was distinctly more strained.

"You don't think, do you, that that was Siva you found?" he asked.

"No," I said. "I think it was one of his henchmen."

"I am afraid it is, too," he said. "I don't think he would let himself get caught so easily." He cleared his throat nervously. "I am all ready to leave. I am only waiting for darkness, and it will be night in a few minutes now. Every moment I put in here seems like an age. I'll only feel safe when I'm on my way."

"Do you want a convoy?" I asked.

"I am afraid that would only make me more conspicuous," he said.

I realized the wisdom of his attitude.

"You had better let us keep in touch with you where you are going," I said.

"I'll have an assistant call you as soon as I get there," he said.

I wished him good luck without much heart in it. I had already given him up for gone. If Siva wanted him, there seemed little we could do about it. That was the bitter truth. To surround Khalid Bey's retreat with ships, to mass men there, to fill the very room he was in with guards, were equally futile. One bomb out of empty space could blow any defense measures we took to pieces. It was maddening, it was infuriating, but it was true. A world-wide organization of men,

picked for their police ability, picked for their courage, were helpless before the schemes of one man. Our superiority of numbers, our resources of armament, did us no good. It only made us the better targets, did Siva turn our way. We were helpless as children before this menace we could not see. We could not anticipate disaster, we could not fight back, we could only wait for destruction to fall. Khalid Bey was right: the only possible chance of escape was in hiding. And the only way we could help his effort to slip out of sight was to leave him alone.

I returned to my original trend of thought about the murder. There was one thing I could not understand, one puzzle that crowded out everything else. Why had the killer of Doctor Ferrand gone on drawing the picture of Siva on the wall when I came in? Why had he acted as though I was not there? Why had he not fought back?

I could not figure that out. It seemed inconsistent, it seemed unreasonable, it seemed unnatural. It would have been understandable if the armor had made him impregnable, but it did not: he had fallen at the first impact of my bullets.

In some way, by some faint parallelism, it seemed in a piece with my escape of the afternoon, when the destroyer of the Blue Express had left me swinging in the air and had not riddled me. I paced the room, trying to put the two together, feeling that somehow they belonged together. Then all at once I stopped pacing and stood for a long time by the window staring into the myriad moving night-lights of craft over the city; stood until my pipe went out. One word was ringing in my mind. That word was hypnotism.

I remembered certain experiments I had seen in psychology laboratories, when the professor stood in one room, the hypnotized subject in another; between the doors were closed. There was no possible physical communication between them, yet the subject obeyed the will of the professor as completely as though they were in the same room.

The subjects of Siva did his bidding miles from him.

They were hypnotized men!

Automata, instruments of crime, blindly obeying the diabolic mind behind them!

That was why they did only certain things, and did not respond to other things, did not seem to see them. Their own minds were blank, they had no knowledge of what was going on, they were conscious only of the master's commands. And since he was not there to see anything new that came up he could not direct them to take measures against it!

That was why the one who had killed Doctor Ferrand had gone on drawing the picture of Siva while I was in the room. The wrecker of the Blue Express had no doubt been given orders to destroy attacking ships; the fact that I escaped from the Bat did not exist for his consciousness. Both men had certain orders, they blindly fulfilled the orders, and what the orders did not cover they were insensible to.

Hypnotized men!

What sort of an organization was this?

Who was behind it, who was this monster that could bend men's wills to make them enter those searing suits of metal, who could send them out to do deeds that their ordinary senses would have revolted at?

It must be some one soulless, some one of extraordinary mental power.

Who was he? Where was he hiding? What was he trying to do?

Where would he strike next?

I racked my brain fruitlessly over those questions. I got nowhere, but my mind would not be still; it kept running at the

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Tzo-Lin's Nightingales

By BEN BELITT

It was an unostentatious little Chinese shop, yet it was the scene of an incredible madness and a weird horror

ALL that day it had been raining; a swift, violent onslaught of long drops, slashing sharply upon the face, pelting against the body, seeping down past muffler and topcoat, into the very marrow of one's bones. I have no great affection for autumn rains, especially when they are inclined to spout into malicious pools and overflow into one's overshoes—that is, for me, the last of the proverbial straws. Accordingly, I sought shelter in the building nearest at hand—a small, unostentatious little shop wedged in securely between two rather dubious "hotels." A meager patch of window-glass constituted its front, upon which were painted in red several Chinese characters, and the name "Tzo-Lin." My plight had made me desperate and so, throwing caution and several drops of rain-water from my dripping umbrella to the winds, I turned the carved brass door-knob, and entered.

Could a snap of my fingers, a mere gesture of my head, have summoned some Nubian genii, ear-ringed and bewhiskered, from the depths of my vestcoat pocket, I should have been no whit more startled. I stood with my mouth agape and with the rain-water trickling from my forehead down my cheek, beading in little drops at my chin, and dropping slowly to the floor—staring dumbly ahead and trying to distinguish between the thousand different objects that confused my vision.

At first I was aware only of a rich, Oriental pungency, so acutely sweet and so heavy as to seem almost tangible. It swept through my brain like a fire. I reeled. Then, gradually, my eyes became accustomed to the gloom and I could make out the innumerable objects arrayed before me.

I could discern that the rectangular walls of the shop were lined with long, dark shelves bearing a fragile burden of curios and *chefs-d'oeuvre* of every type and variety imaginable. Here and there, I could detect the mellowed lambency of bronze and beaten brass and copper—shallow serviettes, long, slim vases, fat and contented-looking pots, little clapperless bells hung in ebony belfries. There were rack after rack of figurines wrought in jade and ivory and green marble, upon whose highly polished glaze the light, subdued as it was, flickered in sharp contrasts of oily highlights and smooth, deep-purple shadows. There were pewter mugs and slender mirrors and metallic tapestries; there were simitars and black telescopes with bands of gold encircling their tips. Everything one could think of, or dream of and even more, was laid away upon those dusty, shadowed shelves. It was as though every people had, in passing, bequeathed some memento to adorn the shop of Tzo-Lin; to help fill his endless rows, and stack them more solidly from floor to ceiling; to dream in the warm silence and peace and grow old, hearing the chiming of the many clocks — slowly, sedately, mysteriously old. . . .

For despite the overwhelming reek of incense, there was everywhere an odor of age . . . incalculable age; of must and decay and mystery. I found myself somehow recalling the picture of a ruined Az-

"He gave a great cry and rose to his feet."

tec city I had once explored by night—recalling the gray chillness of the moonlight upon those moldered stones; the horrible heaviness of the black shadows, unmoving as though they had been frozen into that parched soil; and oddly enough, the very same odor of age unfathomable clinging to those bat-infested ruins that now pervaded the shop of Tzo-Lin. And recalling this, I shuddered.

By this time, every detail of the shop had grown quite visible, and I could penetrate into the darkest corners. Along the entire extent of the shop, hung from the ceiling with golden cords, placed upon low, lacquered tables, suspended from

every available support, every nook and corner, I could see tiers of bird-cages. Within them were discernible little gray shapes—shapes that seemed to be nightingales with their wings tightly pressed to their bodies and their heads drooped on their bosoms. "Artificial birds," I told myself. "Very clever imitation, though."

However, my observations were brought to a sudden end, for, somewhere in the darkness, I heard a soft, slow whisper of slippered feet. I turned my head; the rather emaciated figure of a man in a robe was making its way toward me. "This," I hazarded, "is Tzo-Lin!" And my surmise was correct, for, almost before I was aware of it, I found myself staring full into the face of the aged Chinaman.

TZO-LIN was an old man—a gnarled, ancient patriarch with the infinite look of one who had lived a million years—and lived them all in vain. Indeed, at my first glimpse of that shrunken, parchment-like face, those unwinking eyes of inexorable learning and wisdom, that yellowed mustache depending in long, fine wisps from either corner of his upper lip, below his meager shoulders and upon his breast, I wondered if Time had not been negligent with his hour-glass, and Death with his scythe; if they had not, for all their punctilious thoroughness, forgotten one mortal—and forgotten him for a long time. Perhaps the startling contrast of the brilliance of his silken robes with the faded colorlessness of his skin might have exaggerated the man's age. Perhaps . . .

All this occupied my mind for only an instant, and before I could recover sufficient equanimity to murmur an apologetic excuse, Tzo-Lin spoke. The clear freedom of his voice amazed me. I had anticipated a more or less unintelligible mumbling, cracked and thrown out of pitch by the unbelievable senility of the man. Instead, in richest and almost gong-like tones, Tzo-Lin accosted me. "Ten thousand greetings on your head, in the name of Confucius, the many-eyed! Perhaps this most despicable of men may be of service to your so-enlightened self?"

I could not have repressed a smile at this naïve flow of eloquence, had not there been a distinctly ironic and ingratiating edge to his voice. Immediately I was on my guard, combatting fire with fire. I bowed deeply and countered by asking his hospitality in the lengthiest and most sonorous diction I could muster.

A ghost of a smile hovered for a moment about Tzo-Lin's lips and vanished. He returned my bow with imperturbable dignity, and indicated the little fireplace at the rear of his shop with a slow nod of his head. I made my way thence, through the dim aisles of dusty bric-a-brac. Behind me walked Tzo-Lin, serenely, lightly as a girl, fluttering his ivory fan.

I found the fire, for all its minuteness, to be quite satisfying and congenial. I sat on one side of it, luxuriously toasting my chilled knees before its pleasant warmth. Tzo-Lin sat on the opposite side on a little lacquered bench and stared into the fire, as oblivious of my presence as though I had not been there. For a time we both remained thus, hearing the flames crackle, the fresh wood hiss and splutter, the clocks ticking off the seconds, and the rain pattering softly, monotonously, unceasingly upon the roof. In the end, several questions that had been rankling in my mind forced me to break the silence.

"I could not help noticing how very natural those artificial nightingales are that you have all around. You made them yourself, I suppose?"

Tzo-Lin smiled and shook his head. A sort of contemplative dreaminess crept into his voice. He said: "No. How

could I? The birds—the nightingales are not artificial. . . ." And he resumed his revery.

I laughed his words aside. "Come, come, my dear man, I am no prospective customer. You can be perfectly frank with me—and quite truthful."

The old Chinaman seemed to be speaking in a dream. "I said they were real nightingales, and I repeat what I said. They are as much alive as you and I. Only—they have been—sleeping."

I strove to conceal my contempt for what I knew to be an untruth. "Sleeping?" I asked. "And pray, for how long?"

The man's lips scarcely moved. "Three hundred years ago, they were my wife's betrothal-gift from her husband. . . ."

I drew my breath sharply. What pleasure did this man derive in doling me out such preposterous nonsense? I took no pains to repress my contempt now. "And when, dear sir, will they awake?"

"They will awake on the night—of the full moon . . . on the night when my bride—will return to me for an hour—from the Purple Halls of the—Dead." His voice sank into a whisper.

It was quite enough. I arose from my seat and grasped the Chinaman by the shoulder. "What sort of a fool do you take me for?" I began. "Perhaps——"

Tzo-Lin cut me short with a steady glance. Very slowly he rose, as if in a daze, removed my hand from his person, and spoke with a keen deliberateness. "I will not have—doubted—my friend! If it is your pleasure, you may come and see for yourself—on the night of the full moon. Meanwhile—it will please me to have you—leave."

Again he sank down into his seat, opened his fan, and stared into the fire as though he saw—what?

Despite my resentment of this indignity, I had sufficient presence of mind to do as I was bid. I left—clanging the door shut with a reverberating report that set the brassware trembling and made the china tinkle, leaving the silence and the warmth and the solitude of the shop for Tzo-Lin's sole enjoyment. . . .

THAT month the full moon came with a vivid silverness that dominated the entire length and breadth of the sky. It came floating up out of the darkness of the city, and hung in space like a vast bubble of ice just about to burst, with a transparent mist of cloud-scud clustered about it. On the ground the snow, soft as a new-shorn fleece, lay several inches thick, stretching away on every hand to a wilderness of pearl and diamond, and a low sky flushed to a dull mauve, as though it had been afire. . . .

There were a few flakes tumbling about in a rather lazy fashion when I first set out, but when I had finally reached the tiny lozenge of a shop bearing Tzo-Lin's name, I found myself shouldering through nothing less than a blizzard. My coat flapped and cracked in the wind like a banner, and my umbrella was blown inside out. Hurling the tattered wreckage of the latter into the darkness, I opened the narrow door and entered. I was fairly catapulted inside by the violence of a savage gust that lifted the innumerable rugs and carpets from the floors and blew out the tapestries upon the walls like sails. I shook the snowflakes from my person and made my way back into the rear of the little shop to where the cheerful fire snapped on the hearth. There was a little recess I had not before noticed adjoining the rear compartments; a sort of niche sheltering a gilded idol mounted on a low pedestal of ebony, and lighted on either side by a pair of smoking joss sticks.

As I stood, silently looking on, the

overwhelming reek of a composite incense smote my nostrils again, this time more heavy and nauseating than ever. I coughed. The old Chinaman looked up from his devotions, motioned me to be seated, and then resumed his prayers.

Having no other alternative, I obeyed and soon gave myself up to the magic of watching the yellow flames that leaped and fell, and shod in pale blue slippers, ran swift, little races across the brown logs. And in the small alcove, Tzo-Lin went on praying to his pagan gods, tearing into bits the scarlet prayer-paper. And so the minutes passed on. . . .

Then, when I had almost drowsed off into sleep, the hour struck—slowly, deliberately, portentously. The heavy silence that followed lay like a weight upon my brain; seemed to pour, a tide of whirring soundlessness, into my ears. I gasped for breath, and waited for whatever might happen, my glance riveted upon the little cages that thronged the shop.

At first, all I saw was the quivering of a cage, and then of many cages. Then I could hear the brushing and thrashing of innumerable wings. And finally, to climax the entire inexplicable occurrence, a clear, shrill chirp cut the air like a tiny knife-thrust, soared upward, a silver skyrocket of sound, burst into a sudden confusion of trills, and spent itself, gradually, softly, like a shower of many-colored sparks. Almost immediately, before I could force myself to realize it, before I was even aware of it, the hundreds of little cages all about were swinging violently to and fro with their tassels waving frantically, like yellow hands. And of a sudden there arose such a burst of song, such a passion of mad, sweet music, that I felt my very body must crumble like a liquid beneath it and melt and be lost, quietly, into the turning vortices of that consecrated air. It seemed impossible that such perfect, rounded harmony could come from the throat of any bird in such rapid and faultless succession. Fascinated and half reeling, I watched the nightingales. Their entire bodies seemed to shimmer and tremble in the ecstasy of their music. Each tiny throat so swelled and puffed and quivered that I marveled how like some bubble overweighted with air, they did not suddenly burst.

The whole shop was afire with their singing. The room seemed somehow to grow a hundred times more sweeping and spacious. Each wall seemed to have been thrust back and the ceiling cloven from its supports by some gigantic hand, leaving nothing but the broad and open blueness of heaven about it. The shop, strangely, unaccountably, seemed to fill with mist and vague vapors, twisting and rolling upward, with all the grotesque quietness of a nightmare.

Dimly, then, was borne to my ears the tireless chanting of Tzo-Lin. . . . And his voice, triumphant and exalted into something as beautiful and intolerable as the nightingales' flood of song, was full of love, as though he spoke to someone immeasurably dear to him . . . as though he addressed a—*bride*. I gave a great cry and rose to my feet. . . .

I shall never know what took place in the few moments that followed. A blackness, like the shadow of an enormous arm, seemed suddenly to creep out of the corners, to mount steadily like a flow of dark water, while down from the roof and ceiling fell silence, fold on fold, loop on loop, stilling the crying of the birds, choking the loud surge of my own pulsebeats. . . . More I can not remember.

But the horror, the incredible madness of the waking-hour—that will be with me always. I think it was the cold that first aroused me. I recall shuddering with an

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FUNGI · from · YUGGOTH

By H.P. LOVECRAFT

8. MIRAGE

I do not know if ever it existed—
  That lost world floating dimly on Time's stream—
And yet I see it often, violet-misted,
  And shimmering at the back of some vague dream.
There were strange towers and curious lapping rivers,
  Labyrinths of wonder, and low vaults of light,
And bough-crossed skies of flame, like that which quivers
  Wistfully just before a winter's night.

Great moors led off to sedgy shores unpeopled,
  Where vast birds wheeled, while on a windswept hill
There was a village, ancient and white-steepled,
  With evening chimes for which I listen still.
I do not know what land it is—or dare
  Ask when or why I was, or will be, there.

9. THE ELDER PHAROS

From Leng, where rocky peaks climb bleak and bare
  Under cold stars obscure to human sight,
  There shoots at dusk a single beam of light
Whose far, blue rays make shepherds whine in prayer.
They say (though none has been there) that it comes
  Out of a pharos in a tower of stone,
  Where the last Elder One lives on alone,
Talking to Chaos with the beat of drums.

The Thing, they whisper, wears a silken mask
  Of yellow, whose queer folds appear to hide
A face not of this earth, though none dares ask
  Just what those features are, which bulge inside.
Many, in man's first youth, sought out that glow,
But what they found, no one will ever know.

The Ghost-Helper

By SEABURY QUINN

Jules de Grandin, long known as a ghost-breaker, essays a new rôle, that of "ghost-helper"

"NON, my friend, I mean it," Jules de Grandin persisted. "You Americans are a gloomy people; even in your pleasures you are melancholy!"

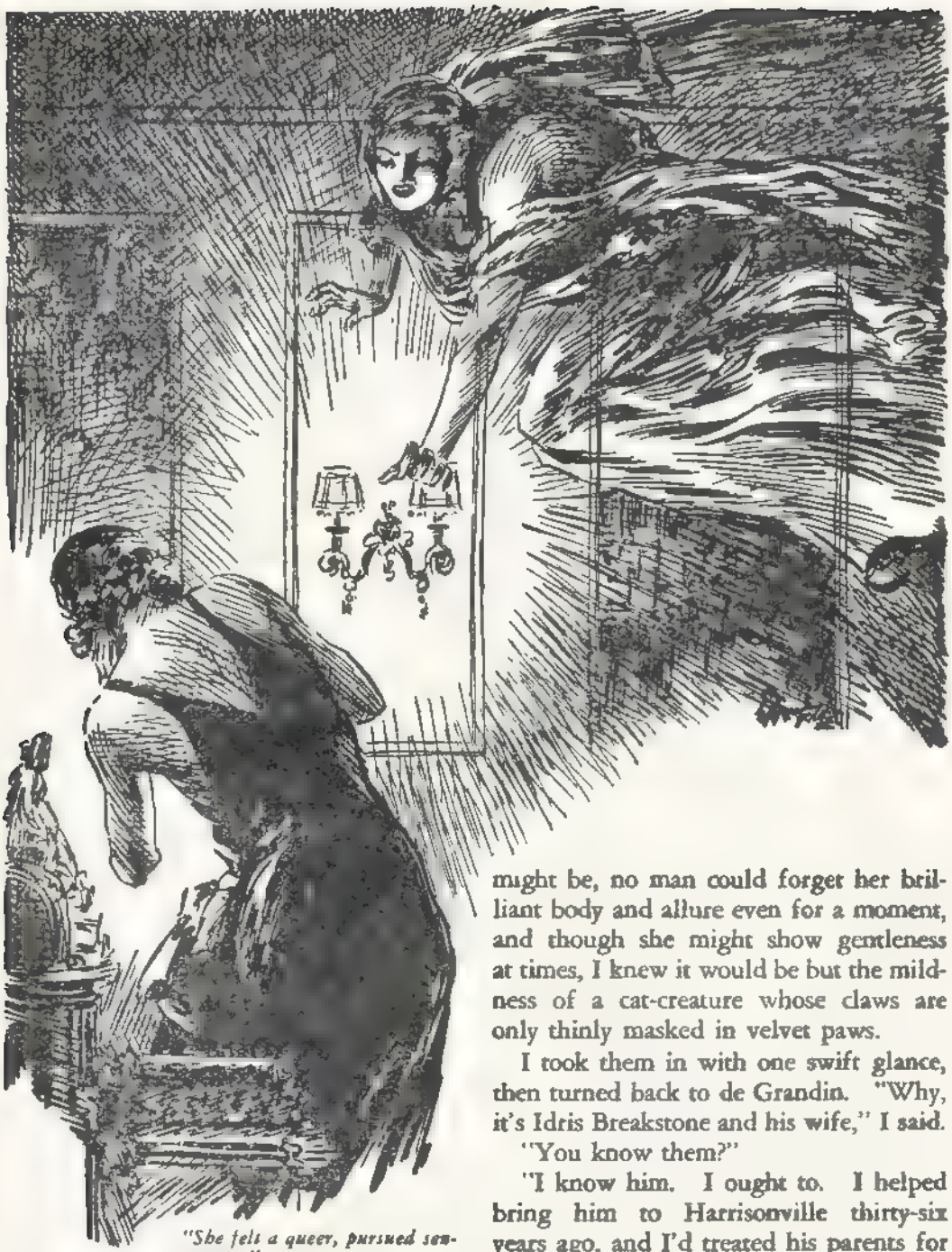
I grinned at him despite myself. The Chez Pantoufle Dorée certainly showed no signs of melancholia which I could see. Waiters scurried here and there between the rows of softly illuminated tables; the air was heavy with the odor of well-cooked food, warm, perfumed woman-flesh and the smoke of excellent tobacco; the muted clatter of china and table silver mingled with the hum of conversation, lilting, flirtatious laughter and the syncopated overtone of the jazz band's throbbing appeal to elemental passion. "Not much evidence of gloom here, is there?" I queried, attacking the Welsh rabbit the waiter placed before me and decanting a mugful of illegal but most enjoyable ale.

"But yes," he nodded, "that is what I mean, *précisément*. Observe these people; they are typical. How is it your popular song says? 'I Dance With the Tear in My Eye?' That is it. The gayety is forced, unnatural. They are like a group of pallbearers telling each other funny stories while they ride to the cemetery; like little boys whistling to tell themselves how brave they are as they walk quick past the graveyard after dark. 'See us,' they say, 'we are devils of fellows; gay, carefree, debonair; we care for nothing, we fear nothing!' But always they look fearfully across their shoulders, and always in the shadows behind they see the hovering, disapproving ghosts of Calvin, Knox and Wesley, of Cotton Mather and William Jennings Bryan. So they are *triste*. Yes.

"Take those ones, by example"—he nodded to the tenants of a table somewhat to our left—*"c'est un couple bien assorti, n'est-ce-pas?* They should have every mark of happiness upon them, and yet observe—is not discomfort, even fear, written in their faces? I think yes. *Que diable?* Is that the way of joyousness?"

Waiting a decent interval, I turned my head and followed his critical glance. The man was tall, slender, stoop-shouldered, thin-faced and studious-looking, a perfect example of American gentleman with generations of Anglo-Saxon heritage behind him. His duplicate could be found on all our college faculties, in half our law offices and experimental laboratories, in many of the higher branches of our Government departments. Calm, level-headed and efficient, but without the blatant hall-mark of the "go-getter" on him, he showed the ideal combination of seriousness and humor which has enabled science and the arts to keep alive amid the hustle of our New World tempo—and to find practical application in the usages of business.

His companion was a sight to draw the eye in any company. Long-bodied and long-limbed in build, graceful as a panther, with a small, proud head crowned with a skull-cap of close-cut hair the shade of ripened maize, long, insolent eyes of darkest blue set under almost horizontal brows of startling black-



"She felt a queer, pursued sensation."

ness, straight-nosed, firm-chinned, thin-lipped, her skin as white as pearl and seemingly almost transparent, she, too, was eloquent of breeding, but her ancestors had bred their women-folk for physical appeal. However fine her mind might be, no man could forget her brilliant body and allure even for a moment, and though she might show gentleness at times, I knew it would be but the mildness of a cat-creature whose claws are only thinly masked in velvet paws.

I took them in with one swift glance, then turned back to de Grandin. "Why, it's Idris Breakstone and his wife," I said.

"You know them?"

"I know him. I ought to. I helped bring him to Harrisonville thirty-six years ago, and I'd treated his parents for five years before that. The woman I don't know. He married her out of town. She's his second wife, and——"

"U'm?" his murmured comment cut me short. "And is that look—that air of malaise which he and his so charming lady display—entirely natural to them?"

I looked again. The little Frenchman was right. In both Idris' face and that of his companion there was a look of vague fear, a sort of haunted expression which a fugitive from justice might wear when strangers were about and any moment might bring the tapping hand and grim announcement of arrest. "No-o," I answered slowly. "I don't think it is. Now you mention it, they *do* look ill at ease, but——"

"Perhaps that one is to blame?" De Grandin cast his glance beyond the Breakstones' table to a man sitting alone. "He looks like Nemesis' twin—or Satan's. Observe how he regards the lady. *Pardieu,* were she a mouse and he a cat, I should not care to undertake insuring her life!"

I followed the direction of his gaze. Seated in an angle of the wall was a man of slight, boyish build with almost feminine, delicate hands idly toying with his watch chain in a listless, indolent fashion. His old face, long, hard-shaven like a priest's or actor's, was in odd contrast to his youthful body, and in the aged, wrinkle-etched countenance there burned a pair of great, sorrowful eyes—eyes like Lucifer's as he broods upon the high estate from which he fell—which gazed stedfastly and unchangingly at the smoothly brushed blond hair above the nape of Mrs. Breakstone's creamy neck.

I shook my head and wrinkled my brow in distaste. It seemed to me that every atom of liquor-heated masculine desire in the room had been merged into the fixed, unwavering stare of those two sad yet pitiless eyes set in that old, wicked face which topped the lithe, incongruously youthful body of the stranger.

"What do you make of him?" de Grandin prompted as I held my peace.

I shook off the sort of trance which held me. For a moment I had been deaf to the café's clatter, blind to its softly glowing lights, unmindful of the food which cooled before me as a single thought-desire seemed to overwhelm me—an almost uncontrollable desire to rise and cross the floor and dash my knotted fist into that old and sinful face, bruise those sorrowful, stedfast eyes and trample that frail, boyish body underfoot.

"Eh?" I returned as I emerged from my fog of primordial fury like a sleeper coming out of sleep. "Oh—excuse me; I was thinking."

"Exactement; I think I know your thoughts; I have the same," de Grandin answered with a laugh. "But ere we give way to desire and slay that unclean-looking person, tell me what you think of him. Is he the cause of Monsieur and Madame Breakstone's perturbation?"

"No," I returned, "I do not think so. I doubt if they realize he's there. If she did, she'd surely tell her husband, and if Idris saw him looking at his wife that way—well, I think our impulse would be translated into action, and without much delay."

The little Frenchman nodded understandingly. "I agree," he told me. "Come, let us eat and go, my friend. If we remain much longer I shall most certainly do that one an injury, and I have no desire to be embroiled with the police so late at night."

THE numbing cold of the evening had abated somewhat and a fine, crisp snow had fallen, covering streets and lawns with an inch or so of gleaming veneer; but the snow had ceased and the moon had risen and silvered the sleeping city with an overlay of nacre when the shrilling of my bedside telephone summoned me from sleep. The biting caress of the light, early-morning wind filtering through the stripped trees made me shiver as I snatched up the instrument and growled a sleepy "Hullo?"

"Idris Breakstone speaking, Doctor Trowbridge," the caller responded. "Can you come over? Muriel—my wife—she's—please hurry; this is urgent!"

"H'm, it had better be!" I murmured grimly as I reached for the clothes which a lifetime of experience as a general practitioner had taught me to keep in order on the bedside chair against such emergencies as this. "Confounded nuisance, knocking a man out of bed like this. Why——"

"What is it, my friend?" Wrapped in a mauve-silk dressing-gown, purple kid slippers on his womanishly small feet, a pink-and-lavender muffler about his throat, Jules de Grandin appeared at the bedroom door, all trace of sleep banished from his little, round blue eyes as he surveyed me with an elfish grin.

"Oh? It woke you too, eh?" I countered, jamming my foot into a shoe and fumbling with the lacings. "Well, misery loves company. No, I doubt it's important; it's Muriel Breakstone, the girl we saw in the night club, you know—her husband just 'phoned, and"—I tied the knot of my second shoe and drew on my waistcoat and jacket—"and she's probably got indigestion from too much rich food or some of that funny liquor they serve there. Little fool! If she'd had sense enough to stick to good, wholesome beer——"

"Await me, my old one; I hasten, I rush, I fly!" de Grandin interrupted as he swung about and raced down the hall toward his room. "The lady will surely not expire if you delay until I dress, and I damn think anything concerning her should interest us. Oh, undoubtlessly, yes."

He was dressed in less time than it took me to go to the garage for my car, and was waiting, my medicine kit beneath his arm, as I drove round to the front door.

I gave him a curious sidelong glance as we swung out into the quiet, snow-muffled street. "What's up?" I asked. "I know you can smell a mystery as far as a Scotsman can scent a bargain, but——"

"*Hélas,* I can not tell you with assurance," he replied. "I have only what you call a hunch to go on; but this so attractive lady with her ill-at-ease manner, and that old-young one who watched her so intently, they intrigue me. I damn think we shall hear more of them, and meantime I would keep in touch with the situation——"

"Well, here's your chance," I interrupted as I brought the car to a halt. "Here we are."

The wide front door of Breakstone's house swung back as we mounted the porch steps, letting a path of warmth and lamplight stream out across the snow. Idris himself let us in and hurried us across the hall with its pavement of turf-soft rugs. "It happened half an hour ago," he told us, and from the way his lips trembled and his firm, cleft chin quivered, we could see that panic fear was tugging at his nerves. "We were out late tonight, and stayed up talking after we got back. We went to bed only a little while ago, and I don't think either of us had more than just gone to sleep when—come up and see her, gentlemen. Do what you can for her—then I'd like to talk with you."

I glanced curiously at his stooped shoulders as we followed him up the stairs. I'd known Idris from his first second of life, and this nervous, trembling, incoherent man was a stranger to me.

A bandeau of black lace held Muriel Breakstone's smoothly shingled and marcelled blond hair in place, and her diaphanous black lace-and-chiffon nightrobe disclosed low breasts and arms and shoul-

ders white and dimpled as a baby's. I bent to feel her pulse, and noted with a start that it was weak and feeble. Her flesh was cold as clay, despite the double blanket of thick camel's hair and the down-filled comforter upon the bed, and all along her hands and forearms there showed the tiny hummocks of horripilation. Her eyes were wide and glassy, and about her nose where it joined the cheeks were the faint-drawn lines of exhaustion. As I leaned forward to listen at her heart her breath struck my cheek, cold and damp as a draft from a cellar—or a mausoleum.

"Pain?" I asked sententiously, laying my left hand palm-down across her right iliac fossa and tapping its back gently with the fingers of my right. To de Grandin I muttered: "Subnormal temperature, light, increased pulsation, low vitality. Almost too soon for para-appendicitis, but——"

"No," the patient answered feebly, fumbling listlessly with the hemstitched edge of the pale-pink linen sheet, "I'm not suffering any, only—terribly—frightened—Doctor. Please——" her voice trailed off to an inaudible whisper, and again a light shudder ran through her, while the goose-flesh on her arms became more pronounced.

"She woke up screaming something had her by the throat," Idris broke in. "At first she was hysterical, but she's been like this since just before I called you, and——"

"Get me an electric pad, or a hot water bottle, if you haven't that," I interrupted. "What d'ye say, de Grandin? Shock?"

"*Mais oui,*" he agreed with a nod. "I concur. External heat, a little ether, some brandy later, perhaps, then a sedative. Undoubtlessly it is shock, as you say, my friend. Yes."

We gave our treatment quickly, and when the patient rested in a light, calm sleep, trooped down the stairs to the library.

"Now, what's the cause of this?" I asked as Idris preceded us into the luxurious room and switched on the lights. "What did she eat at the Pantoufle Dorée tonight? I'm convinced this comes from a nightmare induced by indigestion, though I'm willing to admit I found no evidences of dyspepsia. Still——"

"*Zut,* my old one, we are here to listen, not to talk," de Grandin reminded. Then, to Idris:

"You wished to speak with us, *Monsieur?*"

The young man took a turn across the room, lighted a cigarette, crushed its fire out against the bottom of a cloisonné ash-tray, then snapped his lighter as he set a second one aglow. "Doctor Trowbridge," he began, expelling a twin column of smoke from his nostrils, "do you believe in ghosts?"

"Eh, do I believe in—Lord bless my soul!" I answered.

"*Monsieur,*" de Grandin added, "despite the admonitions of the elder churchmen, that man is a fool who states his implicit belief in anything—likewise his unqualified disbelief—we have the open mind. What is it you would tell us?"

Idris tossed his cigarette aside half smoked, then mechanically lit another. He studiously avoided glancing at us as he replied slowly:

"I think this house is haunted."

"Eh?" de Grandin answered sharply. "Do you say it?"

"Nonsense!" I scoffed. "That's just silly, boy. For one thing, the place isn't old enough. It hasn't been finished more than half a year, has it?"

"All right," the young man answered with a trace of dogged stubbornness in his voice, "let's put it another way. Sup-

pose I say we—Muriel and I—are haunted?"

"Oh——" I began, but Jules de Grandin's quick reply cut through my mocking rejoinder:

"How is that, *Monsieur?* We are interested. Tell us everything. There are no unconsidered trifles in cases such as this."

Idris dropped into an easy-chair, crossed his left knee over his right leg, then his right knee over his left, lifted the top from a cigarette box and replaced it slightly awry, then straightened it with meticulous care. "Do you remember Marjorie?" he asked irrelevantly.

"Humph!" I grunted. Was I likely to forget the sweet, old-fashioned girl he married on his return from France, the joy I'd wished them on their wedding day and the pang his marriage to the exotic creature lying upstairs had caused me when all my skill proved unavailing to keep Marjorie alive? "Yes, I remember her," I answered shortly.

"And who was she?" de Grandin asked, leaning slightly forward in his chair and fixing a level, unwinking stare on Idris.

"My wife."

"Ah? And——"

"Anything I say tonight is told you under the seal of your profession?" Idris asked.

"But certainly, in strictest confidence. Say on, *Monsieur.*"

"Marjorie Denham and I were born within a city block and a single month of each other. Right, Doctor Trowbridge? You ought to know, you officiated at both our——"

"Get on with it," I ordered with a curt nod. "You're right."

"We grew up together," he continued listlessly, "made mud-pies together, played together. I never teased her or pulled her hair, or hurt her in any way, for even as a savage little brat of a boy I was too fond of her for that. We went to school together, and I carried her books back and forth. We went to our first party together, and it was I she went out with when she wore her first long dress and put her hair up for the first time. She never had a beau, I never had a sweetheart—we weren't lovers, you see, just good, intimate friends, but each filled the other's needs for comradeship so fully that the want of other companions never seemed to enter our thoughts.

"I joined up early when the war broke out, made the first training-camp and went across in the fall of '17. Marjorie came round to the house to see me off and brought me a sweater and helmet. She cried a little, and I was pretty close to tears myself, but we didn't kiss. It just didn't occur to us—to me, at any rate.

"Every mail—every mail that was delivered, that is—brought me news of home from Marjorie. They weren't love letters; just good, long, gossipy letters of happenings around town, and they were like visits home to me.

"I got it in the lungs at Saint-Mihiel when we wiped out the salient—good stiff dose of chlorine gas that almost did me in. It put me in hospital and a convalescent home at Biarritz for almost a year. They thought I'd turn out to be a lunger, after all, but I fooled 'em—worse luck.

"It was while I was convalescing at the home I heard—through Marjorie, of course—of my parents' death. Flu sent Dad west just after the Armistice, and Mother went early in '19. Broken heart, I guess. There are such things, you know.

"There wasn't any reception committee or brass band waiting at the station when I came back to Harrisonville. Everybody was too busy making money while the

chance was good to care about a demobbed soldier then, and besides, no one knew I was coming, for I hadn't written. The camp surgeon's office out at Dix didn't make up its mind to give me a discharge till the last minute, and I didn't know whether it would be Harrisonville, New Jersey, or Nogales, Arizona, I'd be headed for an hour before my papers came through the personnel adjutant's office.

"I was in civvies, and no one seemed to notice me when I got off the train. You can't imagine how strange the town where I'd been born seemed as I stood in the station that afternoon, gentlemen," he continued, "and when I realized my home was closed, and no one there to welcome me, I felt like lying down and crying, right there on the platform."

"Mon pauvre!" de Grandin murmured sympathetically.

Idris turned his head aside and winked his eyes several times, as though to clear them of a film of tears. "There was just one place I wanted to go—one place that seemed like home," he continued, lighting a cigarette and puffing it slowly. "That was our family plot in Shadow Lawns. So I jumped in a taxi and went out there.

"It was something after four o'clock in a November afternoon, and dusk was already settling when I walked up the drive leading to their graves—my father's and mother's. I wanted to tell them, 'I'm here at last, dear old people,' and maybe kneel in the grass and whisper something intimate in Mother's grave. But——"

He paused again and drew a handkerchief from the pocket of his lounging-robe, dabbed unashamed at his eyes, and continued: "But there was some one already there when I arrived. It was Marjorie, and she'd brought two bouquets of fresh-cut flowers, one for Mother's grave, one for Dad's.

"Then, gentlemen, I knew. Just as Saul of Tarsus saw the light when the scales dropped from his eyes at the house of Judas in the street called Straight, I saw Marjorie as she really was. I'd always thought her a nice-looking girl with fine eyes and a clear skin, but from that moment she has seemed beautiful to me. All the happiness I'd had from her companionship, all the unvarying kindness she'd shown me throughout our lives, all the dear things she'd meant to me since we were babies suddenly came home to me as I stood beside my parents' graves that afternoon.

"There wasn't any formal proposal. I just opened my arms to her and said, 'My dear!' and:

" 'I've always loved you, Idris, and I always shall,' she told me as I held her in my arms and she turned her lips up to mine and gave and took the first kiss of her life—the first kiss she'd ever had from any man outside her family.

"We were married the next week, you remember, Doctor Trowbridge.

"Poor Marjorie! I hadn't much but love to give her. The war that made 'most everybody rich had ruined my father. He was an importer of aniline dyes, and war with Germany killed his business. All he left me, except a few receipted bills, was something like a hundred dollars cash and a formula he'd worked out for making dyes. He'd died just after perfecting it; they said he'd have had more chance with the flu if he hadn't weakened himself working nights in his little laboratory on that formula.

"I got a job and Marjorie and I set up housekeeping. Dad's old place had been sold to pay his debts, so we started living in a three-room flat. Between times, when I wasn't working in the company's laboratory, I tried to market Dad's

dye formula, but nobody seemed interested. The German patents had been sequestered anyway, and with the treaty signed new importations were coming in from Europe, so no one had much time for home-made products in the dye industry.

"Then the baby—little Bobby, named for Dad, you know—came, and we had it harder than ever. Marjorie—God rest her soul!—even took in sewing to help ends meet, but—well, you know what happened, Doctor Trowbridge. Tuberculosis wouldn't touch these gas-burned lungs of mine, but it fastened on my wife like a wolf upon a lamb. Sending her away was out of the question. We didn't have carfare to take us west of Camden! Marjorie wouldn't hear of leaving me, anyway. 'We've waited so long for each other, Idris,' she told me, 'please let me have you till the last moment.'

"We'd been married with a double-ring ceremony, and on the inside of her ring and mine was engraved *'Forever.'* A few days before she died she asked me, 'Idris, dear, you'll always love me, always love me more than any one, and never, never forget me?'

"I could hardly answer for the sobs that filled my throat, but I put my lip against her ear and told her, 'Always, dear love; always and forever.'

"You know what happened, Doctor Trowbridge. All my love and all hers, and all your years of experience couldn't keep her, so she left me, and her last words were: 'Promise you'll remember, Idris.'

"The irony of it! Marjorie had hardly been buried in the Breakstone plot—certainly the funeral bill was nowhere near paid—when I struck it. The Clavender Company, that had turned me down cold two years before, bid in my patent formula and gave me such a royalty contract as I'd never had the nerve to think of asking. I've had more money than I've known what to do with ever since, and when Bobby grows up he'll be one of the richest young men in the state. And half, a tenth, a twentieth of the money I get for doing nothing every half-year now would have kept her with me!

"I haven't known what to do with either my money or myself these last few years. I've given away more than I ever hoped to own, splashed it around like dishwater, squandered it; still it kept coming in faster than I could spend it. I bought a hundred thousand shares of wildcat mining stock at two dollars. The stuff looked so worthless it wouldn't even do for wallpaper. I forgot it, but it didn't forget me. Within a year it shot up to a hundred, and, of course, I sold. Next month the bottom fell out, and the stock became utterly worthless, but I'd made a fortune in it. That's the sort of luck I've had—now that it doesn't matter any more.

"Last winter I met Muriel Maidstone on a Mediterranean cruise. You've seen her; you know her appeal. I was lonesome as Lucifer cast out of heaven, and—well, we were married. That's that.

"It wasn't long before I realized what a fool I'd been. She came from a good Southern family; poor as church mice. Like so many old families with fine traditions and scarcely any money to carry them on, they'd come to worship wealth as Deity. The mere possession of money seemed to them—and her—an end in itself. Wealth was its own justification, and luxury the only thing worth while. A racketeer with unlimited money at his disposal was greater in their estimation than Galileo and Darwin and Huxley, all together.

"Fool! I married her because she set my blood on fire and stole my thought and made me forget the emptiness of life with her Circe-lure. I learned later I

could have had all she had to give—to sell, rather—without the formality of marriage, provided I'd been willing to pay enough. It was for *that* I took off the little, cheap, plain-gold ring with '*Forever*' written in it, that Marjorie had put upon my finger when we married! God pity me!

"I said money was Muriel's god, but that's only half the truth. Money's first, of course, but power's a close second. When her arms are round a man she can make him swear his soul away and never know it. And she loves to use that power. She kept at me everlastingly, making me vow my love for her, swear I loved her more than anything, finally, declare I loved her above everything in this world *or the next*.

"I haven't had a moment's peace since I took that perjured oath. My conscience has tormented me unceasingly, for I've felt I've been untrue to Marjorie—*and Marjorie knows!*

"I've felt her near me, felt her presence, just as I used to in the old, poor, happy days together, while I shave or dress, or sit here reading in the library, and Muriel's felt it, too. She says the house is spooky and uncanny and wants to sell it; but she feels a queer, pursued sensation even when she's away. It's always with her, it's almost always with me.

"Muriel hasn't much use for Bobby, you know. She hardly ever sees him and never speaks a word to him when she can avoid it. Two nights ago we went out, and, though I didn't know it, she gave the servants the night off. Bobby was left here alone. I was nearly frantic with remorse when we got back, and rushed up to the nursery to apologize to him and say I hadn't realized he was deserted that way.

" 'Oh, that's all right, Daddy,' he answered. 'Mother's been here. She often is.'

"No amount of argument could make him change his story. I tried to tell him Mother was in heaven, and folks up there don't come back to earth, but he persisted.

" 'She comes to see me nearly every night,' he said. 'Sometimes she holds me in her lap and sings to me; sometimes she just sits by the bed and holds my hand until I go to sleep. One time a noise outside frightened me, and I cried, and she bent over me and smoothed my hair and kissed me and told me, "Don't be afraid, Bobbycums. Mother won't ever let *anything* hurt you; anything or any one!" '

"I didn't tell you this upstairs; I couldn't; but tonight when we came home from the theater and the supper club Bobby was restless. He called me several times, and finally I went into the nursery and sat with him. Muriel was furious. She called me once or twice, then came after me. When Bobby protested at my leaving she slapped his face. An hour later she woke up screaming something had her by the throat, went into hysterics, then fell into that semi-coma in which you found her.

"No, Doctor Trowbridge," he concluded, "it wasn't anything she'd eaten that caused that nightmare-fright. *I* know what—*who*—it was. *So does Muriel!*"

I forbore to look at Idris. Obviously the youngster was convinced of everything he told us, and to remonstrate with him would have been as unkind as arguing a child out of his belief in Santa Claus.

Jules de Grandin suffered no such reticence. "What you tell us is entirely credible, my friend," he assured young Breakstone. "As to any dereliction of faith on your part, do not reproach your-

self too harshly. The weakness of men where women are concerned is equaled only by the weakness of women where men are involved. *Madame*, your *ci-devant* wife, she understands and makes allowances, I am sure. Love may transcend death, but jealousy? I do not think so; for perfect understanding and jealousy can not exist together. No."

THE next day was a busy one for me. The customary gluttony attendant on the Christmas season produced its usual results, and I nearly suffered writer's cramp penning prescriptions for bismuth salicylate and magnesium calcinate. I was dog-tired by dinner time and ready for bed at nine.

How long I lay in the quiet slumber of exhaustion I do not know, but that I sat bolt-upright in my bed, all vestiges of sleep departed, I well remember. I had not dreamed, I know that; yet through the muffling curtains of sleep I had distinctly heard a voice which called me by name to rise and dress and go somewhere, although the destination was not plain. Now that I was awake, the summons still persisted, though it was no longer an actual, oral order, but rather a voice heard "inside my head" as one is conscious of the phrasing of a thought or of that subjective sound of ringing bells in the ears which follows an overdose of quinin.

"What?" I asked, as though an actual voice addressed me.

"Eh, you have heard it, too?" de Grandin's query came from the darkened hall. "Then it is an actuality!"

"What d'ye mean?" I asked, snapping on the bedside light and blinking at him.

"A moment hence," he replied, "I woke from sleep with the strong impression that some one—a woman, by the voice—called me and urgently requested that I proceed forthwith to 195 Leight Street. Is there, perhaps, such an address?"

"Oh, yes," I answered. "There's such a number, and it's a pretty shabby neighborhood, too; but——"

"And did you wake in similar circumstances?" he interrupted.

"Yes, I did," I admitted, "but——"

"Then there are no buts, my friend. Come, let us go."

"Go? Where?"

"Where in Satan's name but to that Leight Street address," he returned. "Come, make haste; we must hurry."

Grumbling, I heaved myself from the bed and began to don my clothes, the little Frenchman's admonitions to speed ringing in my ears.

Leight Street, as I had told him, was a shabby neighborhood. Once, years ago, it had been fashionable; now it was like an old duchess in poverty. Drab, dismal rows of shabby old houses faced it north and south, their broken windows and weather-scarred, almost paintless doors like rheumy eyes and broken teeth in old and hopeless faces. Damp, bleak winds blew through the narrow thoroughfare from the bay, bearing a freight of dust and tattered newspapers and the heavy, unwholesome smell of coarse and poorly cooked food—the cheap boarding-house smell, redolent of human misery and degradation as the fetor from a jail or madhouse. Before the old, decrepit houses stood low, rust-bitten iron fences enclosing little yards once used as gardens, but barren of any vegetation save the hardiest of weeds for many years. Somehow, they reminded me of the little fences one sometimes sees about old, neglected graves in country churchyards. Of all the melancholy houses in the melancholy, shabby-genteel street, 195 seemed most wretched. A small, fly-specked sign displayed behind the cracked panes of its French windows advised the passer-

by that lodgers were accommodated there, and a flickering gas flame burned anemically in the shelter of a cracked red-glass globe in the shabby hall behind the shabby vestibule.

We halted before the decrepit gate while de Grandin viewed the place reflectively. "Of all the crazy, crackbrained things——" I began indignantly, but he cut me short with a quick gesture.

"A light burns yonder," he whispered; "let us investigate." Fearing the rusty hinges of the gate might give warning of our entrance, we stepped across the yard's iron fence and tiptoed toward the tall windows which lighted the English basement. Shades were lowered behind the panes, but a wrinkle in the linen made a tiny opening at one side through which one might look into the room by applying his eye to the glass.

Protesting, I followed him, paused at the tiny areaway before the window and looked round guiltily while he bent forward shamelessly to spy into the house.

"Ah?" I heard him murmur. *"A-a-ah?* See, look, observe, Friend Trowbridge. What is it we have here?"

Reluctantly I glued my eye to the chink between the blind and window-frame and looked into the room. The contrast between the drab, down-at-the-heel exterior of the house and the apartment into which I gazed almost took my breath. A bright fire blazed behind polished brass fire-dogs in the open fireplace, an Oriental rug of good quality was on the floor, the furniture was substantial and expensive, well-rubbed mahogany, tastefully upholstered, a fine Winthrop desk, a table spread with spotless linen and glistening with silver and cut glass; most incongruous of all, a silver girandole with a bouquet of fresh-cut flowers. Half facing us, but with his odd, sad eyes stedfastly fixed on Muriel Breakstone, sat the queer, old-young man we had noticed in the supper club the evening before. As he came into my line of vision he was in the act of pouring some colorless liquid into a small phial. His lips moved, though no sound came to us. Muriel, her pale, clear-cut face a shade paler than usual, faced him; her eyes were wide with fear, but the man's long, deeply wrinkled countenance betrayed no more emotion than if it had been graven out of stone. I turned to Jules de Grandin with a question, but the words died stillborn on my tongue, for:

"Here, here, now, what are youse two guys up to?" demanded a truculent voice as the street-lamp's rays glistened on the polished shield and buttons of a policeman.

The little Frenchman leaped back from the window as though its glass had suddenly become white-hot, then turned to the patrolman. *"Monsieur,"* he began, but paused with a quick smile of recognition. "Ah, is it truly you, my friend?" he asked, advancing with extended hand.

"Why, it's Doctor de Grandin!" Officer Hornsby exclaimed with an answering grin. "I didn't recognize ye, sir. What's doin'? Can I help ye? Detective Sergeant Costello told me th' other night that if ye ever called on me for help, 'twas just th' same as if he done it hisself."

The Frenchman chuckled. "It is well to be so highly thought of by the force," he answered, then: "Advance, my friend, but cautiously, for we must not advertise our presence. Look through the gap in yonder curtain and tell me who it is you see. That man, you know him, perhaps?"

"Holy Mike, I'll say I know him!" Patrolman Hornsby ejaculated, backing away from the window and fumbling for his gun. "That's 'Poker Face Louis,' th' quickest-shootin' racketeer in th' game. He's been hidin' out these last

three weeks, 'count of a little shootin' bee he had with some state troopers. Wanted for murder, an' a few other things, that bird is. Well, well, so this is his hide-out, eh? You just wait here, sir, while I go get a couple o' more boys to help me run this baby in. Some one's goin' to get hurt before we finish th' job, but——"

"Why go for help? I am here," de Grandin answered. "Let us take him here and now, my friend. Think of the admiration you will receive for such a feat."

"We-el," obviously, Officer Hornsby wavered between desire for praise and the likelihood of coming out of the encounter with a bullet in him, "a'right, sir; I'm game if you are."

"But we saw that man last night in a supper club," I protested. "Surely, if he's been wanted by the police, he wouldn't dare——"

"You don't know 'Poker Face,' Doctor Trowbridge, sir," Hornsby interrupted. "Puttin' stockings on a eel is a cinch compared with tryin' to arrest him. Of course you seen him in a club. He's got half th' waiters in town on his payroll, an' they slip 'im through th' back doors—an' out th' same way—th' moment anything that looks like a policeman comes in sight. All ready, sir?" he asked de Grandin.

"In a moment," the other answered, stepped back to the boundary of the yard and pried a piece of paving-stone from the loose earth beneath the iron fence. A moment later he heaved it through a window letting out of the front parlor which occupied the building's first floor, and as the glass fell crashing before his missile, leaped forward with Officer Hornsby, straight at the shaded window of the room where "Poker Face Louie" and Muriel Breakstone sat.

Cap pulled down, overcoat collar up about his neck to fend off flying glass, Hornsby crashed through the window like a tank through barbed wire, Jules de Grandin at his elbow. "Poker Face" leaped from his seat with the agility of a startled cat and thrust one hand into his dinner jacket, but before he could snatch his weapon from his shoulder holster, de Grandin's deadly little automatic pistol was thrust against his temple. "Hands up—and keep them there, if you please, *petit porc,*" the Frenchman ordered sharply. "Me, I do not greatly admire that face of yours; it would require small inducement for me to change its appearance with a bullet. Examine him, Friend Hornsby; unless I miss my guess, he wears an arsenal on him."

He did. Under Hornsby's expert search a revolver, two automatic pistols and a murderous, double-edged stiletto were removed from the prisoner's clothes.

"Why, you damned, dirty little Frog, you——" the captive began, but:

"Softly, my friend, there is a lady present, and your language is not suited to her ears," de Grandin admonished as Hornsby locked handcuffs on the prisoner's wrists. *"Madame,"* he turned toward Muriel's chair, "I much regret our so unceremonious intrusion, but—*mon Dieu,* she is gone!"

Taking advantage of our preoccupation with her companion, Muriel Breakstone had vanished.

"After her, Friend Trowbridge!" he cried. "Hasten, rush; fly! We must overtake her before she reaches home—*we must!*"

"What's it all about?" I panted as we reached my car and set out in pursuit of the vanished woman. "If——"

"If we are too late I shall never cease reproaching myself," he interrupted. "Can not you see it all? Madame Breakstone is enamoured of this criminal. It is not the first time that gently brought-

up women have succumbed to such fascinations. No. She is tired of her good, respectable husband, and thinks only of getting rid of him. *Ha,* and that one with the unchanging face, he is not averse to helping her. That liquor we saw him give her undoubtlessly was poison; could you not read fear of murder in her face as she received the bottle from him? But that will not deter her. No. Like a pantheress she is, cruel and passionate as a she-cat. Unquestionably she will administer the drug to Monsieur Idris, unless we can arrive in time to warn him, and—*Dieu de Dieu,* is Satan in league with them?"

THE warning clang-clang of a locomotive bell sounded as he spoke, and I clapped my brakes down sharply, stopping us within two feet of the lowered crossing-gate as a seventy-car freight train rumbled past. De Grandin beat his knuckles on the windshield, pulled at his mustache till I thought he would tear hair and skin away in one tremendous tug, and swore venomously in mingled French and English while the train crawled past. When the gates were finally raised we had lost the better part of fifteen minutes, and to make matters worse, a broken bottle tossed in the street by some one who had patronized a neighboring bootlegger with more generosity than wisdom cut our front tire to ribbons as I put on speed.

Taxicabs were non-existent in that poverty-stricken neighborhood, and no service station was available for half a mile. We limped along on a flopping, ruined tire, finally found a place where a new one could be had, but lost three-quarters of an hour in the search.

"It is hardly worth while hurrying now," de Grandin told me with a fatalistic shrug as we resumed our way. "However, we might as well continue; Monsieur Martin, the coroner, will be pleased to have us sign some sort of statement, I suppose."

Lights blazed in Breakstone's house when we drew up before the door, and servants followed each other about in futile, hysterical circles.

"Oh, thank Gawd, you've come, sir!" the butler greeted us. "I telephoned you immediately it happened, but they told me you were out, and Doctor Chapman was out, too, so——"

"*Ha,* it has occurred, then?" de Grandin cut in sharply. "Where is he?"

The servant gazed at him in awe-struck wonder, but swallowed his amazement as he turned to lead us to the library.

Idris Breakstone lay supine on the leather couch, one hand trailing to the floor, the other folded peacefully across his breast. A single look confirmed our fears. No need to tell us! Death's trade mark can not be counterfeited, and physicians recognize it all too well. His eyes were partly closed and brilliant with a set, fixed, glassy stare, his lips were slightly parted, and light flecks of whitish foam were at the corners of his mouth.

The Frenchman turned from the body almost indifferently, took up the empty glass upon the table, and held it to his nose, sniffing lightly once or twice, then passed it to me with a shrug. Faint, but still perceptible, the odor of peach-kernels hung about the goblet's rim. "Hydrocyanic acid," he pronounced. "Less than one grain is fatal, and death is almost instantaneous. They were stupid, those two, for all their fancied cleverness. A child could not be deceived by this, and——"

"But see here," I remonstrated. "You're set on the theory of murder, I know, but there's a slim chance this might be suicide, de Grandin. We know Idris was—well, talking strangely, to say the least, last night, and we know he was a bro-

ken-spirited, disillusioned man. He might have done this thing himself. Plain justice demands we take that into consideration. It's true we saw that queer-faced man give Muriel something in a bottle, but we didn't hear what they said and we don't really know it was poison, so——"

"*Précisément,*" he nodded grimly. "You have right, my friend. We do not yet *know* it was poison he gave her, or that she administered it, so we shall interview Madame Breakstone and hear the truth from her lovely, guilty lips. Come; we are not men dealing with a woman, now, but agents of justice with a criminal." He strode to the door, flung it open and beckoned to the butler. "Your mistress," he ordered curtly. "Take us to her."

"Ye-es, sir. She's upstairs, sir. I thought you'd like to see her as soon as you were through with the master. Will you come this way, sir?"

"Assuredly," the Frenchman agreed, and fell into step beside the servant. "No noise," he warned in a threatening whisper. "If you advise her of our coming——"

"Sir?" the other interrupted with a shocked expression.

"Exactly, precisely, quite so; I have said it," de Grandin returned sharply. "Your hearing is of the best, my friend. Proceed."

THE sound of a woman sobbing softly came to us as we approached Muriel's bedroom door. "*Tiens, Madame,* tears will avail you nothing," the Frenchman muttered. "Justice knows neither sex nor gallantry; neither does Jules de Grandin in such a case as this." He rapped sharply on the white-enameled panels, then, as the door swung back:

"*Grand Dieu*—what is this?" he asked in blank amazement.

Upon the bed lay Muriel Breakstone, a coverlet drawn over her, leaving only her quiet face exposed. A maid, red-eyed with weeping, rose from her chair and motioned us toward the still form. "You're the doctors?" she queried between sobs. "It's awful, gentlemen. I was down th' hall by Master Bobby's door when I heard Mrs. Breakstone come running upstairs and into her room as if some one was after her. She screamed once, and I came as quickly as I could, but when I got here she was—oh, I was so scared, I didn't know what to do—I couldn't even scream, for a minute! I got her to the bed and drew the cover over her, then got her smelling-salts, but——"

"*Précisément,* it was useless; I perceive," de Grandin interrupted. "You did your best, *Mademoiselle,* and as your nerves have had a shock, I suggest you go below stairs and give yourself a cup of tea. You will find it restful." He motioned toward the door, and as the trembling girl crept out he turned down the coverlet and stared intently in the dead woman's face.

"And what do you make of this, Friend Trowbridge?" he asked, tapping Muriel's throat with the tip of a well-manicured forefinger. Upon the right side of the smooth, white neck was already forming an elongated patch of discoloration, while the left side showed four long, parallel, reddish lines reaching toward the back from a point midway between the tip and angle of the jaw.

"Why—er——" I began, but he waved me to silence, took my hand in his and pressed my first two fingers against the neck in the receding angle below the chin. Only soft flesh opposed the pressure.

"You see?" he remarked. "The right horn of the hyoid bone is fractured. It is often so in cases of strangulation — throttling by the hand. Yes; of course; I

have seen it more than once in the Paris *morgue.*"

"B-but who did it—who *could* have done it?" I stammered. "D'ye suppose Idris could have been seized with a fit of homicidal madness, strangled Muriel, then, returning to sanity and realizing what he'd done, committed suici——"

"*Zut!*" he exclaimed impatiently. "Your question slanders the helpless dead, my friend. That poor one downstairs was murdered, foully murdered. As to who performed the deed for this one—one wonders." But from the expression on his face I knew he had arrived at a decision.

He was strangely silent on the homeward drive, nor would he respond to any of my attempts at conversation.

THEY buried Idris and Muriel Breakstone on New Year's Eve. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of suicide while of unsound mind in Idris' case, and of murder by throttling at the hands of some person or persons unknown in the case of Muriel. At de Grandin's request Coroner Martin, in his private and unofficial capacity of funeral director, saw that the little, plain-gold ring with "*Forever*" engraved on its inner surface was slipped on the third finger of Idris' hand before the body was placed in the casket. The tall, gray-haired mortician and the little Frenchman were fast friends, and though the coroner asked no questions, he nodded sympathetically when de Grandin gave him the ring and asked that he see it was put on the body.

Darkness had fallen and the old year was dying in a flurry of light, feathery snow when Jules de Grandin and I stopped at Breakstone's house, the Frenchman with a great bundle of toys and a gigantic box of chocolates under his arm.

"I bring them for *petit* Monsieur Bobby—*le pauvre enfant!*" he told the child's grandmother, who, with her husband, had agreed to occupy the house until Idris' estate could be settled and permanent arrangements made for the little boy.

"Your daughter, Monsieur Breakstone's first wife, she would have wished that you take charge of her little one in such circumstances," de Grandin whispered as he ascended the stairs to the nursery. "It is well that you are here.

"We shall not waken him if he is sleeping," he added as we halted before the nursery door, "but I should like to look at him, if I may, and leave these gifts where he can find them when he rises in the morning. However, if you think——"

He broke off abruptly, while he and Mr. Denham and I stared at each other in blank amazement. From the darkened nursery there came to us distinctly the sound of voices—happy voices!—of a child's light laughter, the deeper laugh of a man and the soft, lilting laughter of a woman. Then: "Good night, little son, happy dreams; sleep tight!" a woman said, and, "Good night!" a childish treble answered.

Mr. Denham pushed back the door and stared about the room. Save for the little boy, snugly cuddled in his crib, the nursery was empty. "Why"—the grandfather began—"I thought——"

"Hello, Grandpa," the youngster greeted sleepily, smiling at the old gentleman, "Mother's been here, and Daddy, too. They told me good-night just a moment——"

"Why, Bobby, that can't be!" his grandfather cut in. "Your Mother and Daddy are——"

"Say it, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin challenged fiercely, his little, round blue eyes glazing as they rested on the older man,

"say it, and, *parbleu,* I shall pull your nose!"

To Bobby he announced: "Of course they were here, *mon petit,* and they shall come to you many, many more times in future, and he who says otherwise is a foul, depraved liar. Moreover, he must fight with Jules de Grandin who would tell you they may not come. Yes; I have said it." He bent and kissed the youngster on the brow, then laid his gifts upon the table. "They are for you, my little cabbage," he said. "Tomorrow, when you rise, you shall have them all, and—my love to your dear parents when next they come to you, my little one!"

"I WONDER what it was we heard in there?" I asked as we drove home from the theater some hours later. "I could have sworn we heard a man's voice—and a woman's, too—but that's impos——"

"You *could* have sworn!" he interrupted, something like incredulity in his tone. "*Pardieu,* I shall swear it; I have sworn it; upon a pile of Holy Scriptures high as that Monsieur Woolworth's so beautiful tower I will affirm it before all the world. 'Whom did we hear?' you ask. *Barbe d'un chou-fleur,* who should be in the little man's nursery at sleepy-time but those who loved him in life; who but she who summoned us to witness the perfidy of the false wife and her paramour, and to learn the truth about the poison which took Monsieur Breakstone's life? Who but the one who wreaked swift vengeance on the false-hearted murderess even as she gloated over her success? Who, indeed, *parbleu?*

"Death is strong, but love is stronger, my friend, and woman fights for the man she loves. The false one had but short time to enjoy her triumph, while as for her lover—*ha,* did not the spirit of dear Madame Marjorie, which led us to that house in Leight Street, indirectly cause his apprehension, and must he not now answer for his misdeeds before the bar of justice? But certainly.

"Attend me, my friend: Women, children and dogs know their friends instinctively. So, it would seem, do disembodied spirits. When Madame Marjorie sought one on this earthly plane to help her in her work, whom should she choose but Jules de Grandin? In times gone past he has been known as a ghost-breaker. These last few nights, I damn think, he has essayed a new rôle, that of ghost-helper. Yes, *par la barbe d'un taureau,* and it is a rôle he has liked exceedingly well!"

"But see here," I expostulated, "you don't seriously believe that Marjorie's spirit was responsible for all this?"

Across the city, down by the water works, a whistle hooted hoarsely, another took up the cry, in a moment the night was full of shrieking, cheering whistles and clamoring bells. The carillon in St. Chrysostom's belfry began to sing a joyous peal.

"Ring out the false, ring in the true,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow . . ."

Jules de Grandin removed the white-silk handkerchief from the left cuff of his dinner jacket and wiped his eyes upon it, unashamed. "My friend," he assured me solemnly, "I do believe it; I believe it with all my heart. Come, let us hurry."

"Why, what's the hurry now?"

"The Old Year dies. I would greet the New Year fittingly—with a drink" he answered.

The Horror City

By EDMOND HAMILTON

In the heart of the great Arabian desert lay a vast, black-domed city of horror unspeakable, and into this city were drawn three aviators by the tremendous suction of the winds

I REMEMBER very clearly the morning on which Harmon and Hunter and I started on that fateful flight northward that was to bring us in the end to the horror city. Dawn it was, that desert dawn of Arabia that is like nothing else on earth, with the coppery crimson sun blazing up eastward to touch with a warning fiery finger the vast yellow sands that stretched to the horizons. Our great metal plane, sheening in the growing light, was drawn up north of the straggling little oasis that held our camp, and as I sat at the motor's controls, its deafening roar waxing and waning as it warmed up, our two sun-tanned English camp-foremen and their score of white and brown garbed Arab camel-drivers stood in a watching semicircle behind us. Harmon, his gray eyes brilliant with excitement and his spare figure tense from the same cause, was handing into the cockpit the last items of our equipment, while Hunter, his dark face thoughtful, was standing beside the plane, whipped by the wind of its propeller, gazing intently northward over the illimitable sands.

As I fingered the motor's controls the same last-minute excitement and tension that held Harmon and Hunter was strong in me also, for that morning saw us standing on the threshold of an ambition that had been ours for years. For years we three, of the topographical department of one of New York's greatest museums, had had as our goal this enterprise upon which we now were starting, this bold venture by airplane out over the great Arabian Desert. That thousand-mile expanse of burning desert in the Arabian Peninsula, the last great area on earth unexplored by men, had long baffled all the explorers of earth. The Shackley-Stevenson party, the Université de France party, the Snelsen expedition, and but a few months past the party headed by a friend of our own, Dr. Ferdinand Austin—all these had ventured into the vast desert's hidden interior, but none of them had ever returned, and never yet had any airplane flown into those barren wastes and come back. But Harmon and Hunter and I had recked little of this tragic record in our overpowering ambition to be first of all men to explore the great desert's interior and return.

Now, though, as I saw Hunter gazing thus fixedly northward beside our plane I shouted sidewise to him over the motor's roar. "Not losing your nerve now?" I asked, and he turned, smiled, shook his head.

"Hardly, Kirkland," he said, in the same shouting tone, as he climbed up into the cockpit with me. "I was just thinking, though, that it must have been from here or about here that the Austin party's two planes started north but a few months ago."

I nodded without turning, my eyes on the dials before me. "What got them's waiting for us, eh?"

He smiled again, leaned to answer, but then Harmon was climbing up into the cockpit with us, taking the third seat and

adjusting his safety belt. "All right, Kirkland," he was shouting to me. "Whenever you're ready."

I nodded, signaled to the Arabs on each side of the plane to withdraw from its wheels the blocks that kept it from moving forward, and as they did so the plane lurched over the ground with gathering speed, its motor roaring louder, and then was lifting smoothly up into the growing sunlight. Swiftly, as we headed northward, the vast, tawny expanse of the desert was widening out beneath us, the oasis and our brown tents and our followers dwindling and dropping behind. While Harmon and Hunter began to adjust before them the chart-frames and chart-sections on which they were to record all noticeable features of the land below, I kept the plane lifting

"He was raised with titanic power by the great tentacles."

higher until at last we were flying on at a full two miles altitude. This not only gave us a wider view of the terrain beneath but counteracted by the coldness of the air at that height the heat that already blazed from the sun upon us. Also, as I found, a steady northward wind was blowing at that height which added to our speed and would help to conserve the fuel in the plane's great tanks.

So, with that wind behind it, our big metal plane thundered on like some strange fabled bird high over the dun Arabian wastes, in toward the great desert's unknown heart. For hour on hour, while the sun swung up toward the zenith and burned with brass-like splendor on the barren land and swung downward again, we flew on. At every hundred miles or so we departed from our northward course to swing in a great loop or circle to east or west, Harmon and Hunter with binoculars and chart-sections noting every unusual feature of the land below. Little there was to note, though, for there stretched beneath but an unending, slightly rolling expanse of yellow desert, broken here and there by series of black ridges, slopes of cruel naked volcanic rock. All went down upon the chart-sections, however, and ever we came back to our northward course, heading farther in toward the desert's center, flying by then over a part of it that no man had ever seen and survived to tell of. By then, too, the northward wind that had been with us from the beginning at that altitude had become so strong as almost to whirl us on without need of motor, and I saw that the plane was becoming more and more unmanageable in it.

I turned to Harmon. "Turn back?" I cried to him over the motor's roar and the howl of winds, and he nodded, leaned closer to me.

"Best not risk it farther," he shouted. "It's late and this wind is getting too strong for safety."

"Getting almost too strong for a safe turn, too," I yelled back. "But I'll try it."

By that time the roaring of the wind was drowning almost the thunder of our motor, and it was hurling us on at tremendous speed, blowing only at our own great height, since far below the desert sands were unstirred. I grasped the control-stick tighter, then pushed over it and the rudder to bring us out of the wind in a great bank, and then death stared us in the face as the world whirled about us! For as I brought the plane sidewise against the wind's current that current, of terrific intensity now, slammed sidewise against our wings and tail and sent our craft whirling over in a moment like a leaf in a gale! I heard the muffled cries of my two friends, saw yellow sands and wide sky and sinking sun westward whirling about me in a wild kaleidoscope of spinning light, and then was aware that instead of falling the plane was being whirled northward still at immense speed by the gale that gripped it! Desperately I held to stick and rudder, and then with an effort had brought the plane's tail up, was holding it level as it rushed on in the grasp of the wind.

"No chance to turn in this current!" I cried to Harmon and Hunter over the wind's thundering bellow. "We'll have to ride it out!"

"But it's taking us northward at terrific speed!" Harmon shouted. "It's taking us on into the desert's center!"

I shook my head. "To turn is to smash the plane," I yelled back to him. "We'll have to keep with it till the current slackens!"

Yet in the next minutes the great wind seemed increasing, rather than slackening, in intensity, bearing us onward now with cyclonic power. I could not conceive of any current of wind that

could blow so steadily and with such terrible strength northward like this one, but was aware that even with the motor throttled down to its utmost we were traveling at a truly tremendous velocity. The blazing sun was sinking westward, the whole world lit up with coppery flaming fire, the tawny sands and ridges far beneath flashing back at higher and higher speed. I knew that we must be close to the great desert's centermost part; then as there came muffled shouts from Harmon and Hunter I turned to find them pointing excitedly downward. Far beneath on the yellow sands I saw what they were pointing at, a great circle of black, broken ruins that once had been a city. I could glimpse shattered spires and walls of strange design, a great mass of ebon ruins circular in shape and miles across, covered thick here and there with drifted sand. I heard Harmon and Hunter shouting excitedly to each other as the wind's terrific speed bore us on high over that circle of black ruins, heard them shout again as in minutes more we glimpsed two more such circles, one a little to the west and the other far to the east.

Even in the tense work of holding the plane level I thrilled at sight of them, wondered momentarily what people of the dim past had raised those black circle-cities ages before. I did not know, could not know, how soon and how awfully that wonder of mine was to be answered. And in a moment I had forgotten, for now the winds that hurled us on were thundering with such titanic force and speed about us that it seemed impossible our craft could escape destruction in them. At the speed of a hundred hurricanes, it seemed, we were leaping through space high over the desert, and as I saw Harmon gripping the cockpit's edge, gazing ahead with set face, Hunter clinging beside him, I was aware that not for much longer could the plane live in that gigantic increasing current. Then Harmon tensed against his strap as he stared forward, spun to me, clutching my shoulder and shouting madly in my ear.

"The city!" he screamed. "The city ahead—this wind's taking us down toward it!"

"The city!"

There ahead and below there loomed in truth a city, such a city, even glimpsed from afar in that moment, as none of us had ever imagined might be. Black it was and circular of shape, but it was no city of ruins like those we had already passed. It was a circular city of near ten miles diameter, completely covered by a single colossal low-curving black dome that stretched over it, making it seem one gigantic black-domed structure, its frowning walls hundreds of feet in height! At the center of that vast roof, we saw, was a round opening hundreds of feet across; and then as we glimpsed that, as we became aware that the great currents were rushing us lower toward the city, we realized the fearful truth. *The mighty winds that held our plane were being sucked down with it into the great opening in the dome!*

For a moment death seemed full upon us as our plane whirled comet-like down toward that opening in the sunset's blood-like light, and then I grasped the last slender chance left us to escape from the wild maelstrom of air-currents, and opened the plane's throttle to the utmost! Like a falling meteor we plunged toward the opening, our own speed added to that of the down-sucked winds about us, and then as it yawned just beneath us I swung the plane abruptly sidewise and over. There was a crazy moment in which we were flung this way and that with insane fury by the bellowing chaos of winds, and I heard the snap of a wing-strut, gave all up for lost. But abruptly, astoundingly,

the thundering about us quieted a little, and as I instinctively righted the plane I saw that the mighty wind-whirlpool had tossed our plane out from over the great city's dome.

It was reeling now over the desert west of that city, its left wing sagging from the snapping of a strut. Just before us a long, high sand-ridge rose black against the fading sunset, and for an instant we all held our breaths as the plane sagged over that ridge. Then it was past, was sinking downward over the steep slope on the other side, coming to rest on the sand, its motor stilling.

After a moment of utter stillness the three of us clambered out of the cockpit, were gazing ahead and backward. Behind us the ridge hid from view the black-domed city over which we had almost met annihilation, while ahead the sunset's last colors were fading, dusk creeping swiftly out over the desert. From high overhead a thin keening of ceaseless winds came to our ears, but save for it all things in the world seemed gripped by a sudden hushed silence.

"Good God—that city!" It was Harmon who broke the silence. "That opening—sucking those winds down from high above that caught us far out in the desert and whirled us north!"

"But what can it mean?" I exclaimed, helplessly. "A city here at the desert's heart—one that must have life——"

"The thing's unbelievable," Harmon said, shaking his head as though to clear it. "If that city is peopled, why should——"

"But look there!" Hunter suddenly exclaimed. "There to the left—beneath the ridge!"

We turned to gaze where he pointed, then were running as one in that direction, running for a half-thousand feet and then stopping, surveying in stunned silence the object that loomed before us in the darkening dusk. It was an airplane, a great metal one larger than our own, but one crumpled and wrecked hopelessly where it had come to earth. The cabin was empty, but upon the side of the twisted fuselage were silver-lettered words that held us all silent in amazement. They read: "Austin-Arabian Geographical Expedition."

At last Harmon spoke. "Austin—one of Austin's planes!" he said. "Then the great winds that whirled us north must have——"

"Must have caught Austin's planes and whirled them north likewise," I finished for him. "Those terrific unceasing winds—we know now why no plane has ever flown into the Arabian Desert and returned!"

"But what of the other plane?" Hunter exclaimed. "And where did those of Austin's party who were in this plane go?"

We turned instinctively for a moment toward the high ridge looming in the dusk behind us, and then Harmon nodded quietly. "Yes—that city," he said. "They can have gone no place else. And we—we can't leave here until we ascertain their fate."

Our eyes met for a moment and then without speaking we had turned back to our own plane, were swiftly beginning the replacement of its snapped strut. It was but a matter of minutes to replace that strut with one of the spares included in our equipment for such an emergency, yet darkness was upon us by the time we had done, and the white desert stars burned forth. The heat of the darkened desert, swirling liquid-like about us, made us mop our brows when we finished, but then we were seeing to the loads of our automatics, slipping them into our belts. And then, Hunter and I following Harmon, we were starting up through the

thin starlight toward the summit of the ridge, halting there.

Less than a mile ahead of us there loomed against the starlit sands the colossal black mass of the enigmatic city. Its frowning encircling wall and gigantic low-curving dome bulked black and vast in the starlight, while from openings along the great wall came a pulsing thin white light strange to our eyes. Those white-lit openings, stretching far away to right and left in the desert night, outlined and made clear to us the true colossal size of this strange desert city. From it there came to our ears the dull rushing roar of the winds sucked down into its central opening from high above, and the dim beating and clanking of machines of some kind. Silent in the amazement and awe that clutched our hearts we looked, until Harmon made a gesture forward, and then we were following him over the stretch of sands that lay between us and the city.

Every moment saw its great frowning wall, dotted with the white-lit openings, looming greater before us, until at last we stood just beneath that wall. And there, to Harmon and Hunter and me, the strangeness of the great place was overpowering. For though there came out to us now a medley of dull humming and clanking and stamping metallic sounds, and now and then the sound of thick, throaty voices, those voices were not human voices! The whole thing seemed to us, as we stood silent there, unbelievable. The arch of the star-sown desert sky over us, the giant black wall looming with its pattern of white-lit openings before us, the vast dome that stretched for miles out over it, and the medley of metallic machine-sounds and thick, unhuman speech-sounds from within. But then, with pistols ready, we moved silently along the great wall's base. It seemed without door or gate of any kind, though for minutes we moved along beneath it, the lowest of its white-lit openings a dozen feet above us. At last, beneath one of those openings, Harmon paused and turned toward us.

"There seems no door at all in the wall," he said, "and we daren't take time to search completely around the city."

"These openings, then," I said, in the same low tone. "We can get in by one of them, Harmon."

He glanced up keenly for a moment, then nodded. "All right, but be careful," he cautioned. "God knows what is inside."

With that whispered caution Harmon stepped over to the side of the immense black wall, bracing himself in the sand with shoulders against it. Then Hunter was clambering up on his shoulders, bracing himself likewise against the wall, and then with a short silent run I was climbing up over both, grasping the edge of the opening above and pulling myself up into it.

I saw in a glance that the wall was all of a dozen feet in thickness and that there were no bars or obstructions in this opening that led through it to the white-lit interior. Then I reached down, and in a moment more Hunter and Harmon were beside me. We rested, then were crawling in over the opening's flat bottom, a current of cooling air meeting us from within. We came to the opening's inner edge, crouched in it, gazing down and inward. It was a great curving hall, we found, into which we were gazing, one following the curve of the city's edge and with towering black walls and floor, the black material seeming a smooth artificial stone with metallic luster. The long hall, as far as we could see along its curve, was filled only with pulsing thin white light without visible source. Then as we half straightened there came a sound of

movement, of thick voices, away to the right, and there came into view around the hall's curve there a half-dozen beings at whom we gazed with amazement and then with horror unutterable.

They were great black octopus-men! I can only describe them thus, for it is thus they seemed to me in that moment. Each of them seemed a sphere of black flesh a foot or so in diameter, in which were set two round black-pupilled eyes and a narrow mouth-opening from which came their thick and throaty speech-sounds. Out from this central ball of flesh or body there branched innumerable black tentacles five to six feet in length, of which each creature must have possessed dozens, branching out thickly in every direction from the central ball-body. Upon some of those tentacles each of the half-dozen black octopus-men were walking along the hall, and with others they held metal tools and instruments. Down the curving hall and beneath the opening in which we crouched they strode smoothly on part of their multiple limbs, conversing in their thick voices, and then had passed us, were moving on and disappearing around the hall's other curve.

Stunned at the sight of those creatures of horror, we could not move, could not speak, in the moment that followed, and well was it for us that it was so. For hardly had the creatures disappeared around the hall's curve to our left when there appeared other great black octopus-men like them, a half-score in number, returning along the hall. They did not glance up toward us as we crouched low in the opening above them, but passed quickly around the hall's curve and out of sight, one addressing a thick word or two to the others as they passed. None of these carried anything, but swiftly there came still others from the right, following the first we had seen, and carrying metal tools and small mechanisms as the others had done. In groups of ten or twelve they passed us, until more than a half-hundred had gone by us, and then as no more came there was silence in the curving hall for a time.

In that silence, broken only by the sounds of distant machines and thick voices and dull roar of winds high above, we regarded one another in mind-dazing terror, and when Harmon spoke his voice was a strangled whisper. "God!" he whispered. "This city—those creatures!"

"What does it mean?" I demanded fiercely, clutching his arm. "Harmon—those octopus-creatures—intelligent——"

"It means that those things—those many-tentacled black monsters—are a form of intelligent life, one that we peoples of earth have never dreamed might exist upon it."

"Then these octopus-things," Hunter exclaimed, "are the people of this city—of all this great domed city?"

My mind reeled at the suggestion in those incoherent words, but Harmon caught my shoulder and Hunter's in a tense grasp. "There's some great mystery about these things, I think," he whispered tensely, "and maybe some great horror. But despite that we've got to venture into the city to see if Austin's party or any of it is here!"

"But Harmon," I began, "this whole vast city—those octopus-men—perhaps in countless swarms here——"

He shook his head, his voice low and urgent. "We must chance it," he declared. "We can evade them, I think, and we've got to find out whether any of Austin's party are here. We couldn't go back, without knowing."

I felt the force of his words, and after a silent moment in which I fought the horror that chilled me, gripped his hand. "You're right, Harmon," I said. "We couldn't go back, without knowing."

Hunter silently nodded, and Harmon turned at once to the edge of the opening in which we crouched. "Down into this hall, then," he whispered. "We've got to get farther into the city."

With the words, and with a final glance to right and left along the white-lit hall's curve, he was swinging down over the opening's edge, dropping to the smooth black floor. In a moment Hunter and I had followed and stood with automatics ready beside him, finding that the air inside the hall was far cooler than that in the desert night outside, a steady cool breeze blowing along it and out the wall-openings. As we began moving silently along the curving hall, on the alert for sounds of approaching octopus-men, we came in a few moments to a narrower hall that branched inward from the one we followed, toward the great city's center. It was lit with the same sourceless pulsing white light as the curving one, and along its length we could see great doors from which came some of the dull mechanical sounds we heard. Instantly Harmon motioned to us and led the way down this narrower hall.

As we moved down it we made out, far ahead, a few octopus-men coming and going at intervals across it, but these were too far away to glimpse us in the thin light of the towering-walled corridor. Once too we heard a rumble of thick voices that seemed close behind us and whirled in swift panic, but to find that it was a half-dozen or so of the octopus-men moving along the curving hall we had just quitted. So we crept on, and as Harmon and Hunter and I followed that narrow hall we would have made a strange enough picture for any who had beheld it, we three comparatively little humans with pistols glinting in our hands, creeping along beneath the towering wall of the thin-lit corridor, creeping on into this enigmatic city of horror in which all about us we could hear the sounds of unnumbered octopus-men and their activities. Then we reached the first of the great doors opening from the hall, peered cautiously around and through it.

It was a great room into which we peered, and the chief objects in it were a battery of huge globular things of metal ranged against its walls, in the front of each of which was a translucent section of quartz-like substance. From each came a steady hissing sound, and out through the translucent section of each was pulsing a white light, the wavering light that illuminated all this city as though without source. These great globular mechanisms were giant light-pumps, pumping that pulsing light ceaselessly out of themselves, just as another mechanism might pump water! They pumped an unending vibration into the ether in the city, it was evident, and it was evident too that the vibration was tuned to pass through the solid black walls, for it did so without hindrance. Tending these great light-pumps were a half-score of the black octopus-men whose countless tentacles were busy at their intricate controls.

For moments we three stared at the strange, unearthly scene, and then as Harmon made a silent gesture we were moving on, slipping one by one past the great door without being glimpsed by the octopus-men inside. Once past it we moved swiftly ahead, glancing into the next rooms and finding that they too held great light-pumps and their attendants. As we went farther down the corridor, though, crouching now and again against the wall as octopus-men crossed the hall ahead of us, we came to rooms of a different type. They were, it seemed, great laboratories of different kinds, and in them were busily moving scores of octopus-men. There seemed to have but little occasion to venture out into the corridor,

and so we were able to peer into the great rooms unhindered.

In one of them octopus-men were testing strange, humming motors that seemed to run with enormous speed and power though with no visible source of current. In another a score of the creatures were gathered about a mass of retorts and delicate metal tubes, and one was pouring silvery liquids from these into a single retort, the others watching the experiment with utmost apparent interest. In still another great room that we peered into three octopus-men standing on a high insulated platform were controlling great coil-like mechanisms from which blinding sheet on sheet of lightning was crashing toward a central coil, the creatures on the platform observing those crashing bursts and manipulating the controls of the mechanisms that produced them.

It was in still another room that we saw what filled us with a greater wonder still. This room had none of the pulsing omnipresent light, but was darkened and seemed to extend up to the great dome of the city itself. In that room were ranged five giant squat tubes swinging in frameworks, connected to unfamiliar mechanisms, and at an eyepiece near the bottom of each sat an octopus-man, gazing up through them! They were telescopes, we knew, strange telescopes of a design unfamiliar to us but which could apparently be turned upon the stars through the great black roof that lay above! Octopus-astronomers were these, and in rooms beyond their strange observatory we glimpsed great astronomical models, computing-machines, other octopus-men coming and going.

That room was near the end of the narrow hall we followed, and as we slipped past its door, the corridor making a right-angle turn a dozen feet ahead, we moved like men caught in some strange dream, coming to a halt before reaching the hall's turn. Crouching there, the steady cool breeze from inward upon us, we felt our minds reeling from what we had seen.

"Octopus-men in thousands," I whispered. "In thousands, with as much intelligence as we have—perhaps more! A city of them—as Hunter said——"

"Steady, Kirkland," came Harmon's voice. "It's a city of horror, surely, but we've got to get farther into it."

"But we've seen no trace of Austin's party," I said. "If we had only some idea as—*but look!*"

My horror-stricken whisper was not needed, for Harmon and Hunter had seen at the same moment, had seen the five great octopus-men who had abruptly come round the corner of the corridor just ahead and who had halted short, the eyes in the central ball-body of each full upon us. For only a moment they stared, and then, their numberless tentacles flinging them forward at incredible speed, had leapt toward us!

Before I could raise the pistol in my hand one of the creatures was upon me, and in that instant I seemed grasped tightly by numberless hands as his tentacles fastened upon me. I heard a throaty cry from one of the things, a hoarse shout from Harmon, and in the same moment the swift lashing crack of an automatic beside me, repeating swiftly. I was raised with titanic power by the great tentacles, and as the whole scene thus spun around and beneath me I gripped my own pistol and more by accident than design pressed its trigger, sending a stream of fire into the central ball-body of the thing that held me. There came from him a thick, strangled sound, and then he was slumping over sidewise, his tentacles going limp and letting me fall to the floor. I rose, to find that two of the things lay dead before us, that another was falling, and that two others had gripped Hunter

with countless tentacles coiled about him. My pistol spoke at the same time as Harmon's, and as the lead from both tore through the ball-like black central bodies of the two things they too fell. We stumbled to Hunter's side, Harmon shouting in my ear.

"Out of here before they have us!" he cried. "They're coming—behind us!"

I spun around, and glimpsed far down the corridor through which we had come an increasing horde of octopus-men racing toward us. A few of the foremost held metal tubes which they pointed toward us, and from those tubes little shining darts or blades flicked through the air and over us. They were shouting in a growing clamor of thick voices.

"On around the corner!" Harmon was crying, and we stumbled forward, around the corridor's turn just as more of the shining darts stabbed past us.

THE narrow hall, we found, turned sidewise for only a dozen feet and then back toward the city's center. And as we flung ourselves around the second turn, into another far-stretching length of the thin-lit hall, we heard from behind the thick-voiced clamor of alarm growing each moment, spreading swiftly far out over the great city, taken up and echoed by octopus-men through its maze of halls and corridors. Desperately we ran on, praying that the alarm might not spread ahead of us. We could glimpse no octopus-shapes in the corridor ahead of us, though behind the clamor of pursuit grew ever greater, and as we raced on we were running past the doors of great, busy rooms almost careless of discovery by the octopus-men working inside them.

Glancing into some of those rooms as we hurled ourselves on I saw more great light-pumps and laboratories of strange activities, saw too one great hall or series of halls into which we gazed for an instant even in the peril that was ours. It was only a glimpse—a great white-lit room with other rooms beyond it in which were looming mysterious shining mechanisms. From these, into strange molds there poured a thick black viscous liquid, while at one side we glimpsed other things being taken from molds, ball-like black flesh-masses from which branched countless tentacles—bodies of octopus-men, apparently, being taken from those molds and being worked on by groups of octopus-men in the great rooms beyond! I caught the flash of steel instruments, the pulsing glow of strange rays or forces being turned on those new-made bodies, and then we were past the great door, rushing still on down the corridor.

"Those bodies!" Harmon was panting as we ran on. "Artificial bodies—all this city then——"

But I was scarce listening, for at that moment the spreading clamor of thick voices behind came suddenly louder to our ears, and glancing back I saw that a horde of the octopus-creatures had burst into the length of the corridor we followed, far behind!

They glimpsed us, were racing forward, throaty voices shouting, hallooing to others behind them. I glimpsed an opening in the wall beside us that was not that of a room, and jerked the others toward it.

"This other corridor!" I cried, and in the next moment we had thrown ourselves into it, were racing along it for a few score of yards and then turning inward toward the city's center again.

It was only to the central regions of the great city, it was apparent, that the alarm had not yet reached, for far across its halls and rooms behind us was coming and going the confusion of sounds of alarm, the thick-voiced cries and rush of hurrying octopus-men. It was only by keeping ahead of that alarm that we

could evade them, yet as we raced onward, through the maze of intersecting corridors and past the doors of countless rooms, I knew that not for long could Harmon and Hunter and I escape thus. For the time being, it was true, we were leaving our pursuers a little behind, since they were forced to spread out and search all the rooms and corridors after us, while we could run straight onward. Yet as we ran on through the thin-lit halls with the cool breeze in them upon us, with the sounds of the city's mechanisms and octopus-people all about us and the other confused sounds of pursuit behind, I knew that not for long could we evade thus the hordes that swarmed in the city around us. For even in the next minutes we were forced to throw ourselves blindly into this corridor or that to avoid octopus-men appearing suddenly ahead.

That mad flight through the octopus-peopled mazes of that city of horror had a quality of nightmare. Ever, it seemed, we were stumbling forward through endless white-lit halls, past rooms in which the monstrous octopus-shapes labored in unguessable activities, and ever from behind there beat dully in our ears the clamor of the aroused city. Far across the interconnecting rooms and halls behind us were ranging the throaty shouts of our pursuers, and there came to us now and then a sharp jangling of bell-signals. Our long flight northward over the desert, our battle with the winds that had hurled us on to this city, our venture into it—all these had sapped our strength, and as we ran on we all knew that minutes more would see our pursuers upon us. That knowledge was closing like a cold tight hand around my heart when, running on through another narrow corridor, we all but burst out into a vast, white-lit space that loomed suddenly ahead.

We caught ourselves on the very point of rushing out into it, and shrank back into the corridor. Peering forward, panting, we saw that it was a circular hall a thousand feet across that lay before us, one whose great walls rose to the giant dome-roof of the city itself. More than half of this vast hall's space, however, was occupied by a gigantic cylindrical column, smooth black like the walls, that rose to the great roof overhead and that was several hundred feet in diameter. From inside that cylinder came an unceasing thunderous rushing sound, while out from openings around its base there blew steadily toward us and toward all the corridors that branched from the great hall a strong cool breeze, the unceasing currents of cooling air that vanquished the desert heat in this desert city. Upon the giant cylinder's side near its base was set a square panel of metal gleaming with innumerable white button and wheel-switches, while ranged before that panel were a score of octopus-men armed with the dart-flinging tubes.

As I gazed at this strange scene, at the mighty cylinder from which the cool breezes blew ceaselessly outward, I had a dim comprehension of what we were seeing. "That cylinder," I whispered. "It's here—at the city's center—beneath the dome's central opening that sucks down the great winds——"

Harmon's eyes widened with sudden understanding. "Then it's the cylinder that sucks down those winds! And from it——"

"Harmon, they're coming down this corridor!"

It was Hunter's tense whisper that broke in upon us, and as we turned swiftly we heard, far back around the turns of the corridor, the steadily waxing babel of thick octopus-voices of our pursuers. They were searching along the hall in which we were and in moments more would be pouring around its last turn upon us! An utter despair for

a moment seized us, for it was too late now to return along the corridor and enter one of the others that branched from it; yet if we waited where we were a few minutes more would see our pursuers upon us. It was Hunter, though, whose voice again came to us.

"This great hall ahead!" he whispered. "To get across it—it's our only chance!"

"Across it—and with those guards in it——" Harmon said, but Hunter pointed swiftly forward.

"They don't face us—grouped around that control-panel as they are. And if we could slip along the left wall without any of them turning toward us we could get across and into another corridor!"

SILENTLY, with Harmon leading and pistols ready, we slipped out of the corridor and into the vast white-lit space, along the wall that curved to the left. Like shadows we stole along that great black wall, our eyes upon the guards on the cylinder's other side. In a moment more we were in one of the opposite corridors.

With something like renewed hope we ran down this new hallway, in whose thin-lit length were the doors of other great rooms. Behind us the clamor of alarm was spreading still across the city, but was fainter to our ears than before. And then, with shattering suddenness, there emerged into the corridor but a few feet ahead of us two great octopus-men, who stared full at us for an instant and then, as we ran squarely into them, gripped us with countless powerful tentacles!

For a moment I strained there like mad in the grip of those great tentacle-arms, striving to bring my pistol up in their pinioning grasp, Harmon and Hunter struggling as wildly beside me. But abruptly we ceased our struggles, stood motionless as though turned to stone. For one of the great creatures that held us, his two strange eyes upon us, was speaking rapidly to us in his thick, throaty voice—was uttering, hoarsely and distortedly, not the speech-sounds of the octopus-men we had heard, but *words*, human words, English words! In a stunned daze we stood there as from that monstrous octopus-shape came the stumbling, throaty words, pronounced as though by a child learning to speak.

"Harmon"—the throaty word seemed to thunder in our ears—"Harmon—you and Hunter—and Kirkland—here——"

As those thick-voiced words came to us I saw Hunter reeling white-faced against the wall, overcome by the horror that held me in a daze, saw Harmon reach a shaking hand forward toward the great octopus-shape before us who had spoken.

"You—who—what are you?" he was ejaculating, the words stumbling in his throat. And from the black octopus-man came an answer, a word, that sent a greater horror crashing through our minds.

"Austin!" The throaty voice held compressed in it a hell of torment. "Austin—and this beside me, Cooper—like this—but us——"

"Austin—Austin and Cooper!" choked Harmon. "Oh God!—it can't——"

Closer behind us again burst out the throaty clamor of our pursuers, crossing the great hall. The two great octopus-men before us glanced swiftly down the corridor, then grasped the three of us, were jerking us on down the hallway toward one of its doors.

"In here!" commanded a thick voice in my ear. "They're almost on you."

As though in a dream we felt ourselves propelled down the corridor by the tentacles that grasped us, felt ourselves hurried through the door and into a long thin-lit room that we saw in a moment

was a great storeroom that held small plates and sections of metal, and flat, strange mechanisms, stacked one upon the other. Into a corner behind these stacks the two octopus-men propelled us, then turned again to the door. In a moment more came a rush outside, an increasing clamor of thick voices, and we glimpsed a horde of octopus-shapes rushing down the corridor. Many held the metal dart-tubes, and as they passed the door they halted for an instant, flung throaty questions at the two octopus-men in the room, whose quick reply sent them racing on. In a few moments all had passed, the alarm spreading out before them as they beat through the city's rooms and hallways for us, and then the two black octopus-shapes were coming again to our corner, crouching beside us, hidden like us from view by the stacks of metal sections.

At sight of those two monstrous bodies close beside us, the ball-like central bodies with their round black eyes and their countless branching snake-like tentacles, all the horror I had first felt rose again in me. Then one of them reached forth a great tentacle to grasp Harmon's shoulder, though the latter shuddered when it touched him.

"Steady, Harmon," the throaty voice uttered, the words thick and slurred. "I know what you feel—but it is I—Austin—in this body."

"But that body," Harmon stumbled. "That great octopus-body like the others—Austin—impossible——"

The octopus-man's unhuman central body came toward us, the eyes terrible. "Not impossible, Harmon," he said, the throaty voice whispering up to an appalling crescendo. "Not impossible. Oh, God, no! I, Austin—in this body—and Cooper here like me—here in this horror city that the fiends of hell loosed on earth ages ago!"

"Cooper!" I whispered. "Austin's assistant! Then it's—you?"

The throaty voice of the other monstrous shape answered. "Yes—I—Cooper—caught like Austin in this body—in this hell on earth——"

"And the others?" Harmon asked.

The thick voice of the first octopus-man—of Austin—was deeper. "The others died," he said. "The others had death—clean death—and Cooper and I this!"

His throaty voice went on. "You know how our expedition started—how we started to do what never men had done, to penetrate the secret heart of the Arabian Desert. In two planes we started from an oasis at the desert's southern edge, Cooper and I and a photographer in one plane, Garrett and Simms and two others in the other. We flew north over the desert for hours, and the northward winds about us got ever stronger until they were hurling our planes on despite themselves. It was those winds that brought your own plane here, Harmon? I thought so. They slammed us north toward this city, and when we reached it Garrett's plane was sucked down into the great opening of winds at the center of its dome. Our own managed to win clear from the winds over the city, but was so battered that it was hopelessly wrecked on landing, killing the photographer. Cooper and I thought, though, that perhaps some in the other plane might have survived in this city, and it was in any case the one place for us to go. So we came here.

"We came here. We got through one of the wall-openings. We were seized in the next moment by the monstrous octopus-men that appeared around us. They took us before a group of octopus-men who seemed rulers of some sort and who gave orders concerning us. In obedience to those orders we were taken then to a

series of great rooms where other of the creatures were making, from viscous black flesh-compounds, great octopus-bodies like their own! We saw them prepare two of those bodies, placing in them eye-lenses and nerve-structures already prepared, saw that in each ball-like central body was an open cavity. Then before we could guess their purpose they had pumped a gas quickly into Cooper's nostrils that instantly anesthetized all his body. That done, they suspended him in an odd metallic frame and at once, using partly fine metal instruments and partly a disintegrating liquid of some sort, were opening his skull. They cut away half its bony structure, skilfully cut around and beneath the brain, disconnecting the nerve-connections, and then were quickly lifting the brain from his skull and placing it in the cavity prepared for it in the octopus-body!

"Swiftly they connected the nerve-ends of Cooper's brain to the connections awaiting them in the octopus-body, and as quickly they closed the opening in that body, fusing the flesh itself together. And then that octopus-shape rose, walked unsteadily to and fro, held by the others. It was Cooper! Cooper's brain, Cooper's mind, cased in that monstrous body! And even as I watched in horror they were grasping me, carrying out with me the same procedure. The anesthetic gas they pumped into my system made me lose all sensation of feeling but I could see and hear them as well as ever as they worked on me, cutting the brain from my body! All went dark when they severed the nerve-ends, but soon I came back to consciousness to find that it was not my own arms and legs that responded to my brain's commands but great tentacles! I too was one of the octopus-men, my human brain prisoned hopelessly in that monstrous body!

"In the days that followed, they made Cooper and me see the hopelessness of any attempts at escape, for even could we escape across the vast desert that hid this city what fate would be ours in the world of men? And in those days, even through the horror that numbed our minds, we learned something of the strange tongue the octopus-people spoke, and thus learned something of their past. We had been set to work operating and watching some of the great light-pumps, but could move through the city and see the things it held. And from what we saw, and what we heard, we pieced together the past history of these strange octopus-creatures. And we learned, then, that ages before the brain of each had been in a human body also, that they had been men!

"They had been men, members of a race inhabiting the land where now is the vast Arabian Desert. They had built many great black cities, the ruins of which we had ourselves glimpsed in our mad flight northward, but had all come at last into this one great domed central city. Its giant dome shut out the sun's direct rays, the light-pumps keeping it illuminated beneath the dome. And to keep it cool always despite the fierce desert heat they had devised the giant cylinder-pump you saw at the city's center, that sucks down through the dome-opening immense volumes of the cold air high above in the upper atmospheric levels, causing thus the great winds that rush ever toward this city. That great cylinder-pump forces the colder air out through all the city's halls and ways, escaping at last out through the wall-openings, and is of colossal power. If it were turned on at full force it would suck such titanic winds down into the city as to smash it into fragments with their cyclonic power, the great pump's controls

being always guarded for that reason, as you saw.

"In this domed, cooled city, therefore, the peoples of that race had lived, cut off from the rest of earth by the impassable desert around them. They could easily make their foods synthetically, and their one great remaining ambition was the conquering of death. And they had found a way at last to do that. They could make artificial bodies of synthetic flesh, and they began to transfer their own brains, their human brains, into those bodies, as their immense science permitted them to do. After trying various shapes they adopted a many-tentacled octopus-like body-shape, it being simpler than others and giving them greater powers, and into those octopus-bodies they transferred their brains.

"That was ages ago, and ever since they have lived thus, human brains in octopus-bodies. Whenever a body was worn out or damaged in any way they needed only to transfer the brain from it into a new body, and so they had achieved their last desire and had conquered death. The few men from outside who reached their great city across the deserts they captured and made into octopus-men like themselves, placing their brains also in the artificial bodies. And that is what they have done to Cooper and me—have prisoned us in the most terrible of all prisons, in octopus-bodies like their own!"

As the great throaty voice ceased, Austin—or that octopus-body that held his brain—crouched silent with the other monstrous shape beside us. The distant clamor of pursuit across the city, the thin white light that pulsed about us, the two terrible shapes beside us—they all infused more than ever the quality of nightmare into our surroundings. Then Harmon was speaking, his voice strangled.

"Austin—Cooper!" he was whispering. "In those octopus-bodies! But what is there for us to do?"

"There's but one thing to do if you're to escape." Austin's thick voice was decisive as he came closer. "You must get back across the city to its edge, back the way you came."

"The way we came?" I exclaimed, and both of the great octopus-bodies seemed to make an affirming movement.

"It's your one chance," Austin said. "While those pursuing you go on across the city there's a chance for you to double back the way you came and get to the city's wall. For once they find you're no longer ahead of them they'll know you're hiding and will start a systematic search of all the city."

"But you, Austin," Harmon began, "what of you and Cooper?"

The octopus-man's strange eyes looked at us in silence for a moment before replying. "Cooper and I have had a plan of our own for some time," he said finally, "and we want to carry that out. But if you three are to escape you must start back across the city now."

The two strange shapes had risen now on their supporting tentacles and we rose beside them. Harmon's eyes searched their alien ones. "You really have a plan of escape for yourselves?" he asked, and it was Cooper that answered.

"We have really a plan," his thick voice assured us. "The one way in which we can escape."

"But you three must get clear first," Austin's throaty tones broke in, "and we daren't lose more time."

He was leading the way to the room's door, by then, moving outside and peering up and down the corridor, then motioning us to follow him. As Harmon and Hunter and I stepped out into the hall in turn, Cooper's octopus-shape close behind us, I felt a sudden weariness. What length of time it had been that we had

raced through the city from that wild pursuit I had not been able to guess, but hours it must have been, I knew, since first we had entered this place of horror. Away to the eastward we could hear the wave of alarm still sweeping through the city, the crowds of octopus-men who had pursued us still searching across its halls and rooms for us, but ahead of us the clamor had died somewhat, and as we moved down the corridor toward the great hall we had crossed at such peril I felt again a slight hope rising in me.

STRANGE and unearthly must our little procession have seemed as we moved along the narrow hallway. The great octopus-man that was Austin went first, moving on part of his countless tentacles, the eyes in his central ball-body on the alert. After him came Harmon and Hunter and I, haggard and disheveled, automatics still in our hands, and the monstrous shape that held Cooper's brain came last, as alert as Austin. And well was it that they were so alert, since before we had gone more than a score of yards down the hall there came a sudden sound of throaty voices and there emerged into it from one of the great rooms beside it a half-dozen or more octopus-men who came straight down its length toward us.

At the first sound of their voices Austin's great shape had wheeled to us, a tense throaty whisper coming from him, and in answer to that whispered command Cooper had sprung to his side, both ranging themselves against the corridor's wall, while the three of us crouched low between them and the wall. Their two shapes, standing together as though conversing, hid us from a casual inspection, and as the group of octopus-men went by, with a word to Austin and Cooper, we prayed dumbly that none might turn a more penetrating glance in our direction. None could have done so, though, for all moved on down the corridor, conversing still. Then, without words, we were springing up, were moving on.

We came without further incident to the place where the corridor debouched into the great hall of the cylinder of winds. Peering out into it we saw that the guards at the cylinder's control-panel were still ranked before it, to one side of the cylinder itself. There seemed none other in the big white-lit space, and across it from us opened the mouth of the corridor we sought, through which we had come. With all our nerves taut, therefore, we moved out again into the great hall, slipping along its wall. The thunder of winds sucked down inside the cylinder, the cool rush of its out-pumped breezes about us, were loud in our ears. We heard, too, over them the distant clamor of the searchers far behind, eastward, and an occasional thick utterance from the guards. Still we stole on, came as though after an eternity of time to the mouth of the corridor we sought, were slipping into it—and then as we set foot in it we recoiled in horror. But a half-score feet before us was another group of a half-dozen octopus-men just emerging from it!

In the instant that they saw us there came from Austin's great shape a throaty shout. "On, Harmon!" he cried. "Get past them——!"

His cry was broken into by other throaty cries from the octopus-men before us, cries of alarm echoed by the guards in the great hall. Then as they and the guards alike leaped from before and behind us my own automatic and those of Harmon and Hunter were detonating, spurting flame toward the six before us. Two crumpled, collapsed, and then as another fell Austin and Cooper, towering on their supporting tentacles in monstrous size and strength, then grasping with numberless tentacles the central ball-bodies of two of the creatures who leapt on us and crushing them

in a titanic grip, crushing the human brains inside them! The remaining one of the six had grasped both Harmon and me with its tentacles, great arms that coiled swiftly round our bodies, but there came again the crashing report of Hunter's pistol and the thing sank lifeless.

Clang — clang — clang — clang — the sound was of shining bladed darts that flashed around us from behind and struck the black wall! We spun about, saw the guards of the great cylinder's control rushing toward us, their upraised tubes spitting the swift-flying deadly darts! Then the great tentacles of Austin and Cooper had flashed out around us, had drawn us with a lightning movement into the corridor's mouth.

"On!" cried Austin's throaty voice. "The city's edge, Harmon—your one chance now! The whole city's rousing!"

For as we fled forward the guards in the great halls behind us, leaping into the corridor after us, were uttering thick shouts of alarm that were bringing answering shouts from all the city's vast maze around and behind and before us! Shining darts again flicked after us, clanged against the wall as we threw ourselves round a turn in the corridor, but Hunter this time half halted, blood welling from his shoulder. But with the great tentacles of Austin and Cooper half supporting and half dragging him he was stumbling on with us.

Through the great maze of intersecting hallways we were racing, Austin's great octopus-shape leading, the vast throaty roar of the aroused city loud about us now. I heard louder shouts from behind, the flick and clang of more darts, then vaguely glimpsed other octopus-men pouring into the corridor ahead of us! Again our pistols cracked and the little group that had rushed into the corridor seemed to collapse before us. Over them we went, raced around two right-angle turns and into another corridor, down its length in the thin light. I was half aware of great tentacles reaching at me from a doorway, missing me as we raced past, of a great hallooing of throaty voices and jangling of bells behind and to our right and left. As we reached the end of this corridor's straight length I glanced back and saw the mass of octopus-men rushing down it after us, the guards of the great cylinder of winds still at their head, dart-tubes loosing death toward us.

Through shorter connecting ways we were rushing now, our breath coming in great sobs. Two octopus-men appeared from a connecting corridor before us, and hardly had I glimpsed them in the thin light, when the tentacles of Austin and Cooper had caught them, slammed them sidewise against the wall with terrific force. We stumbled on, bursting into another straight long corridor, stretching far ahead. As we ran into it Austin and Cooper abruptly halted.

"The city's edge is at this corridor's end!" Austin cried. "On down it, the three of you—get to the wall and out its openings!"

"But you, Austin?" Harmon clutched the great octopus-man frantically in that moment. "You and Cooper?"

"We go no farther with you," the throaty voice answered. "Cooper and I have our own way of escape, man—we're going to use it!"

We hung for a tense moment beside the two great octopus-shapes, their eyes upon us, the wild babel of pursuit bursting louder behind. The great tentacles of the two gripped my shoulder, and Harmon's and Hunter's, for a moment, and then they had thrust us forward.

"On, Harmon!" came Austin's thick voice again. "The city's edge—get clear!"

And then, half pushed forward thus, we were stumbling ahead again, and as we glanced back saw the black great octopus-shapes of Austin and Cooper slipping

through one of the doors in the corridor's wall. With fast-waning strength we flung ourselves forward, past other doors, glimpsed far ahead the end of the long hallway we followed, glimpsed the curving hallway there that marked the city's edge. But we were not half-way to that curving hall before there burst loud in our ears from behind a triumphant clamor of throaty voices, and we glanced back again to see a great horde of the octopus-men bursting into the long corridor and racing after us! And as I sent another tortured glance backward at them I saw that as they raced past the door into which Austin and Cooper had gone, the two octopus-shapes of our two friends were slipping out of that doorway and racing back toward the city's center.

WITH the last of our strength we flung ourselves down the last few hundred feet of the long corridor, Harmon and I supporting the staggering Hunter between us. Flick—flick—clang!—and I felt something like a red-hot iron brush against my side, felt it wet, as one of the swift-flying darts from far behind grazed me. But before more darts could flash towards us, with the great shouting horde of our pursuers still some hundreds of feet behind us, we were bursting out of the corridor into the curving hall in which it ended. Before us in the opposite wall were the great openings, through which we glimpsed the starlit desert. We stumbled toward one of those openings, and with frantic strength Harmon and I lifted Hunter up into it, dragged ourselves up after him. But from the right, along the curved hall, three other octopus-men were running toward us.

My automatic roared twice and two of them went down as the bullets ripped through their central ball-bodies, but my third pressure on the trigger produced but a hollow click. The pistol's magazine was empty! And before Harmon could reach around me to fire, the great monster had reached up with swift and mighty tentacles that coiled like light about us. He was pulling us down into the hall again, and at the same moment we heard the wild throaty clamor of the horde of our pursurers racing down the long corridor. For an instant we strained with all our force against the deadly grip of the thing's numberless tentacles, and then abruptly I wrenched my arm free from it and hurled the heavy pistol with all my strength at the creature's central body.

It crashed into that soft ball-body between the round eyes, and the thing went limp, its tentacles releasing their hold on us. We leapt through the opening, half dragging Hunter, and dropped to the soft sand outside, the wide star-gemmed desert sky over us, the vast black light-dotted bulk of the city behind us.

"The plane!" Harmon was shouting. "If we can get to it in time——"

We staggered forward in a stumbling run away from the wall. From behind came the throaty clamor of all the octopus hordes of the aroused city. A hundred feet — another hundred — with a last mighty effort we rushed forward in the starlight. There came a choking cry from Hunter and he went limp in our hands, collapsed. Falling, he carried Harmon and me to the ground with him, the last of our own strength gone, into a bowl-like hollow in the sands into which we slumped. And as we collapsed there came an exultant throaty shouting from behind again, and we looked back in that instant to see hordes of octopus-men pouring up from inside the black city into the great wall-openings. They had glimpsed us, were pointing toward us. Over the thin keening of the winds high above came their triumphant thick-voiced shouts, and another moment would see them rushing

out upon us. Another moment—captured—our brains in octopus-bodies——

But why had they paused, there in the openings? Why were they looking upward, crying out? Why were they shouting back to those inside the city, shouting back as though in terror? A strange, terrible sound was forcing itself to my brain, a growing, thunderous roaring that had replaced the shrilling of the winds high over us. A vast crashing and rumbling of gigantic cyclonic winds that were suddenly whirling in a wild chaos of bellowing air-currents from all directions toward the city. Colossal hands seemed buffeting us as those giant winds smote us, even in the shelter of the hollow in which we lay, and as their mighty currents rushed toward the black city and toward the opening at the center of its dome, thundering on it with a vast roaring as of a universe made vocal, there came to our ears crash on crash of walls inside that city. Its mighty dome and walls were being riven and shattered to fragments by the colossal winds roaring into it!

"Austin! Austin and Cooper — the cylinder of winds!"

"Austin!"

I cried out even as Harmon screamed beside me, light flashing into my brain as the giant city crashed into destruction before us. Austin and Cooper—their way of escape—they had seen the guards of the cylinder's control pursuing us — had slipped back to that control and opened it to its utmost! And even as Austin had said, when opened to its full power that huge cylinder-pump was sucking down into itself, down into the city, such cyclonic winds as to rive the city like one of cardboard, to crash its domes and walls and rooms and corridors to fragments! And as walls and dome crashed down thus in awful destruction before us, the long-drawn thunder of their shattering mixed with the roar of winds, burying beneath them Austin and Cooper and all the octopus hordes. I cried out again. The way of escape—the one escape for Austin and Cooper that they had spoken of—death! For death only, death that they had brought down upon all the octopus-people, could free them from those octopus-bodies in which their human brains were prisoned!

The colossal winds were lessening, now; the whirling walls of sand they had raised were sinking again. And as their thunder and the crash of collapsing walls subsided we staggered up from the sand-drifts that half buried us, gazed through the starlight toward the city. There was no city! There was only a vast, far-stretching mound of broken black fragments, covered thickly here and there with great drifts of sand. Harmon and Hunter and I gazed, as though incapable of comprehension. The winds about us had quieted to a strong breeze, and it was as though all the world's forces, after that thundering moment of destruction, had withdrawn into a hushed silence. Above us the stars shone palely, the dawnlight showing eastward.

We found ourselves, in a moment, stumbling toward our plane. Protected from the winds by the high ridge, it seemed unharmed. In moments it was climbing upward, motor thundering, heading southward over the vast mound of fragments; heading over the desert toward our distant camp, toward civilization, toward the world that did not know and never had known of the horror city that had for ages stood behind us until it had drawn upon itself and all within it its own great crashing doom.

"There were no blows or cuts or arrow wounds."

The Thing in the Bush

By JANE SCALES

Weird death struck down the men who penetrated the bush country in search of the strange blue diamonds

NOT knowing what else to call it, we had called it "the Thing." Anyway, that's what the natives said it was, when they looked on the man who had come down the river.

He had drifted down in a little dugout, and he was cold, and stiff, and *blue.* That was the peculiar thing about him. He was *really blue.* The black boys who were with me when we pulled him in, sobbed and shrieked, and wouldn't touch him. When I questioned them they shouted hysterically—"The Thing! The Thing in the Bush has got him!"

Their silly palaver irritated me and I harshly ordered them to bury him. They dug a grave and by means of poles pushed the body into it. All the time they were filling it up, they made signs and kept up their incantations till it got on my nerves, and I had to come out of my shack and make them hush.

Sometimes I wondered why we had come, for Krake and I had both held

steady and lucrative positions in the bank at Melbourne. Without a moment's hesitation we had given up our jobs and had started on this devil's quest. It was only when the fever was on me that I would realize how foolish we had been. I would curse the black beggar who had brought the diamond into the bank. One by one, the incidents of that fateful day would pass in review before my heated brain.

I had been at work at my desk on some matter of routine, when I felt, rather than heard, a commotion in the main lobby. I got up quickly and stepped out into the big room.

A cringing, leprous-looking native, with a triangular scar upon each of his bare shoulders and another deeper one upon his chest, was standing before one of the teller's cages. I recognized the fact instantly that the black man was from the north bush-country, for under rather peculiar circumstances, many years before, I had seen a native similarly marked, and I knew that a tribe who lived in that section branded their members in this strange fashion, as though they had been so many sacred pigs of the Dagepan. That this fact was not generally known, I was fairly certain.

The native was standing there, gesticulating wildly to the flustrated man in the cage, and holding out to him in his filthy, open palm, a rough stone which glittered in spots as though it had been made of fire itself.

Every man who has lived in Australia knows a diamond when he sees one, no matter how deeply the brilliancy is embedded in the rough matrix. In an instant the bank was in a furor. Men were rushing in and out of the doors, calling loudly to each other. An excited crowd had gathered round the native, and the now frightened black man was half pulled, half jostled into the street where already men were bidding for the shining object in his hand.

At last, a rough-looking individual, holding a thick roll of bills high above his head, dashed out of the bank, through the mob and up to the native. He thrust the money into the black man's hand, and the scared, nonplussed bushman seemed only too glad to hand over the stone to him. Then, silently, with furtive looks, the native slunk through the crowd and disappeared.

For days, Melbourne was demoralized. Krake and I had left immediately. At my suggestion we had headed north, for I remembered the body-marks of the man, though I did not speak of them, even to Krake. For some unknown reason, as is often the case in such circumstances, an unauthentic rumor had started the general rush toward the East Coast.

Women, both native and white, followed the prospectors; living during the day, God knows how, and hanging at night on the outskirts of the many small camps, like vultures of the bush. In my fevered brain I would curse them as an added responsibility and danger, though, till Whitewine had joined us, we had been bothered with them little enough. Then, when the chill was over, I would forget all and my enthusiasm would return with full force.

Whitewine had come to us at Cobar. Krake and I had known the fellow in Melbourne and we both rather disliked and distrusted him. Some years previous, Whitewine had left Australia on a night-boat, and had taken up life on a small island outside the pale of law. He had carried a retinue of servants with him, and for a time had lived surrounded with the luxury of an Oriental monarch. The rumor of a new diamond-field had proved too much for his grasping soul, and at the risk of imprisonment he had returned

to Australia, and, uninvited, had attached himself to us.

At last, after weeks of hardship and toil, sickness and monotony, we had reached the Gilbert River, and we hoped, by following the stream into Queensland, to make our strike.

KRAKE and Whitewine had started out at daybreak and had been away only an hour when the blue man came. My nerves had been given a nasty twist at the sight of him, and somehow, though it was only midday, I kept wishing Krake would come in.

At last, he came. I could see that he was in a state of nervous excitement.

"Come inside," he said bruskly, and we went into the shack. "We're on their stamping-ground, all right," he continued. "An arrow flew over my head this morning. It came from back of me. My guide let it fly, for he had dropped behind me, and as the arrow whizzed over my head I turned quickly and caught him with the bow in his hands and the strings still quivering. When I questioned him, he lied like a dog, and said that he was trying to bring down one of those gilt-edged parrots, which you and I know have no value to a native. Oh, no, he didn't mean to kill me," Krake added, when he saw my look of astonishment and fear. "It was a signal of some sort. You see, it was just as I found this thing."

He held out a half-dull, half-glittering stone—our first diamond. I could scarcely keep from shouting, but Krake held up a warning hand.

"They know too much already," he said, pointing toward the group of natives huddled outside our thatch.

"Where is Whitewine?" he asked.

"Whitewine has not come in," I answered.

Krake wheeled. "What!" he said sharply. "He left me four hours ago. He said he was coming straight back here."

We stared at each other. Krake became angry.

"He's jumped us! That's what he's done! He was with me when I found this."—The diamond in his hand gleamed white and blue. Somehow the blue in it made me shudder, for I thought of the dead man.—"The nasty beast," he continued. "We might have known it."

"Never mind about Whitewine," I answered. "If he *has* jumped us, he'll regret soon enough, and if he *hasn't*, God help him!" I had been in the bush before.

Krake cooled down at my words. We hid the stone and went outside. It was then I told him about the man, how blue he had been, and how the natives had carried on about the Thing that had killed him.

Krake grew thoughtful. "It may mean more to us than we think," he said. "The man had evidently been in the region of the Upper River. That's home ground to the bushmen, and they resent strangers. You see, I found the diamond while I was scratching around in the gravel of the upper stream, and I guess I haven't been the only white man in that part. That poor devil had probably heard something that made him think the field was in the North, too, though why he didn't go to the East Coast with the rest of 'em is more than I can say."

Krake looked at me piercingly. He, also, had wanted to head east, but had given way to my insistence on taking the northern route.

"I wonder what it was that made you——" He left the sentence unfinished, and continued his theorizing about the blue man.

"Anyway, he's paid the penalty of going uninvited. Strange they didn't go

after me today," he mused. "The dickens of it is, though," he said, waking up, "how did they kill him, and what made him blue? Poison of some sort, I guess."

"Oh, he was poisoned all right," I answered. "There were not any blows or cuts, or arrow wounds. But *how* was he poisoned? No sane man would eat any of their food or drink unanalyzed water in this devil's hole, unless driven to it, and this fellow was too healthy-looking a specimen to have suffered great hunger or thirst. We'll have to accept it, Krake. The Thing got him," I said laughingly.

Krake shivered.

Already night was leaping upon us. The heavy dew dripped like rain from the vanilla vines. The chill air was tense, save when some animal cut the stillness with his unearthly cry. A small, whirring night-creature hit me in the face, and as I knocked it away, my hand shook. I wondered what Whitewine was doing—alone in that mass of horrors.

He really *had* been a beast, and though neither of us would admit it, we were not so sorry as we might have been. If some mishap had befallen him, he had had warnings enough from Krake and me, for we had both felt that his infatuation (if one could call it that) for the ugly, fat native dancer would lead to trouble. She had come to his notice after we had entered the bush. Krake and I had thought at first that she was simply a camp-follower who had strayed, somehow, away from the eastern-moving crowd; but she had not succumbed at once to Whitewine's attentions as most native women would have done under such circumstances. She had held him off with the coquetry of a brown cabaret-girl of the coast. One does not expect things like this in the interior. She had been too subtle, and I felt that it foretold no good. No one but Whitewine could have become interested in a woman like that; though, God knows, men sometimes, through sheer and desperate loneliness, seek strange companionship.

Well, for all that, the three of us had sworn faith to each other, and as Krake and I talked on into the night, we decided that at least we must make some effort to find Whitewine, or find out what had become of him.

Suddenly, Krake dug his fingers into my arm. "Listen," he said through his teeth.

From the distance came the sound of native drums—tom-tom-tom-tom—dull, ominous. We laughed nervously, to ease the unknown dread which both of us felt and neither would own up to.

All at once from the Upper River there was a glimmer of light, not red, like fire, but *blue*—as blue and as cold as steel. Suddenly I recalled having seen that light the night before, and I wondered, as the cold sweat poured off of me, if that light had anything to do with the blue man who had come down the river.

Again came the dull, throbbing sounds, and again the hair rose on my head. Was it the Thing? And was it coming toward us? One could dodge the little feathered arrows, but the Thing! God! I think I tried to pray. Finally, there was silence, and the light was gone.

The natives, too, had seen it, and they were like frightened children. We spent half the night quieting them. Then we slept a bit, but it was the sleep of madmen. Somewhere out there in the bush was the Thing!

It was noon of the next day when we found Whitewine. We stumbled over him, for already the jungle was at its work, and he was almost covered with green trailing vines and creepers. He was lying on his face, and his pick was by his side. Krake and I turned him over.

As we did so, the two black boys who were with us screamed. *He was blue!*

We quietly ordered the blacks to dig a hole. While they were at it, we kicked at the little creeping tendrils and leaves close around. Hidden under them, we found what we knew would be there—Whitewine's small leather pouch, which the avaricious man had taken the precaution to remove from his belt and hide before his fatal adventure. In it, as far as we could tell from our hurried examination, were four beautiful pieces of matrix, which looked as though they contained at least three dozen stones. I tied the pouch to my belt, making sure that the boys did not see, and then we laid the dead man in the hole.

The boys were like maniacs and refused point-blank to go on. We could have made them, but they were of no use to us in their present state of mind, so we sent them back to the clearing where we had camped the night before, and where the other natives, almost as frightened as these two lunatics, were waiting for us in abject misery.

Then we decided to go to the hill alone. We had our compasses and knew we could find our way about.

We had just started along a half-hidden trail by the river's edge, when that uncanny sixth sense told me we were being followed. I think Krake felt it at the same time, for we both wheeled suddenly, and there, standing in the path, was Whitewine's ugly dancer. Just back of her was another woman. Her aquiline features stood out in sharp contrast to the thick lips and flat nose of the ugly one. She probably was a beautiful remnant of some lost race such as one sometimes finds in the interior.

Krake and I gasped at her beauty. I think we both trembled. Men are like that when they are in the bush.

The ugly one grinned; it could not be called a smile, for the lips were too swollen, and the teeth too decayed. She came up to us quickly and would have embraced me where I stood, but I pushed her off in disgust. She shrank back into the leaves and even her false, amorous glances could not hide the hatred that was in her eyes. She looked meaningly at her beautiful companion. Quickly they plunged backward, and even in the light of day were lost to us as suddenly and completely as though they had never appeared.

It was like an ugly dream, offset by a glimmer of beauty, and we both tried to forget it. But forget it I could not. There was something too sinister about it. Why were they following us? What did they want? They did not, in all probability, know the value of the diamonds we were after; and, supposing they did, what could they hope to gain by this sort of thing? We were certain that they did not know about the stones in the pouch at my side. It was simply an instinctive, savage defense against intruders, I concluded. But, what would be the end? The unanswered questions beat in my brain till I thought I should go mad.

It was only when we began finding the matrix that we forgot our danger for a time. All through the afternoon, the sound of our picks resounded through the stillness, till the jungle muffled and choked it and sent it back to us like a boomerang. The water swished at our feet as if in a fury for having lost its secret, and once I heard a sound so inexplicable that I dropped my pick and hurried under cover, my hand on my gun. Krake heard it, too.

"Only an alligator calling its mate," he said, trying to make light of it, but I saw that he did not believe his own words.

In spite of all this we returned to our work, and by evening our small pouches

were full of the stones—stones precious enough to buy kingdoms and the honor of women. I wanted to go back, but Krake, adventurer that he was, prevailed against my better judgment, and we stayed on till the night.

"If I can get hold of the pretty one," he said, "I may be able to find out why the light was there, and why the man was blue."

I knew then why he had wanted to stay, and I saw that he desired the woman whom we had seen that morning more than the diamonds that were in his pouch. He was still under the spell of her beauty.

"Better go easy, Krake," I said. "You may find out to your sorrow."

Nevertheless, there we stayed like two blind fools, and I knew that with the dark would come the woman.

THE sun went down into the river with a splash. For a second, a few rays lingered, like long bony fingers pointed in mockery. Then we were alone in the tropic night. We waited for the light. It came, and it was blue—God! how blue! It came from the top of the hill.

We moved toward it in a circle, crawling on our stomachs part of the time. Nearer and nearer we went, and our blood froze as we advanced, though we did not know why. Finally, when we were close enough to see, we crept down into a little gully. There were lizards in the gully, but we didn't mind, for at least they were alive and tangible, and not like that unseen, unknown terror.

We saw that the light was coming from an altar. On the altar was a pot of burning liquid, and the flames that came from it were—blue! Presiding over this hideous fluid was a native priest. He was a devil, in truth. Into his face and into his body he had dug small holes, and the holes were filled with tufts of wild cotton. The little patches of white stood clear on the black flesh, and formed a pattern so ghastly that my heart almost stopped beating at the sight.

In front of the altar stood a row of dancing girls, and among them we recognized the faces of the two women whom we had seen that morning. They were all swaying to some sort of chant, and then the drums began their beating rhythm. Those wild creatures, fat and squat as they were, could dance. Even the muscles of their faces twitched to the music, and their eyes gleamed with excitement.

There was a ceremony, bloody, gruesome. Even then, I did not understand to what extent its horrors would be felt. One by one the dancers came to the altar. They knelt there, each in turn, with the blue light all about. As they knelt, the priest approached them. In his hand was a sharp, thin flint-rock. With this rock he cut a hole in their flesh, so that the blood came in a stream. Then he dipped the rock into the burning blue liquid and again applied it to the sizzling wound. The smell of burning flesh reached our nostrils, and we sickened. There was no outcry from the girls. They had the fortitude of fiends.

We had seen enough. We did not understand it. Our one desire was to get away—away from the smell of blood and scorching flesh.

At the foot of the hill we breathed more freely.

"At least, they are letting *us* alone," said Krake.

I said nothing, but I was not so sure. Something told me that our movements had been watched, and that it was only cunning that made them wait. I thought of the Thing. . . .

Even before we got to the bush, she, the beautiful one, came toward us. My eyes telegraphed a warning to Krake, for

in the light which still flickered on the hill, I thought he could see me. But the man was all on fire with the sight of her.

"I'll find out now what it's all about," he whispered.

He looked at the girl, and his eyes answered her amorous stare.

Slowly I backed toward the bush, for I felt that something was taking place, something that I did not understand. I felt the presence of the Thing.

Krake was speaking in the native jargon. "Tell me, my pretty one, how did you get that wound upon your arm?"

And she answered in words as beautiful as Love itself—"Let me tell you—like this——"

Before my eyes, they kissed.

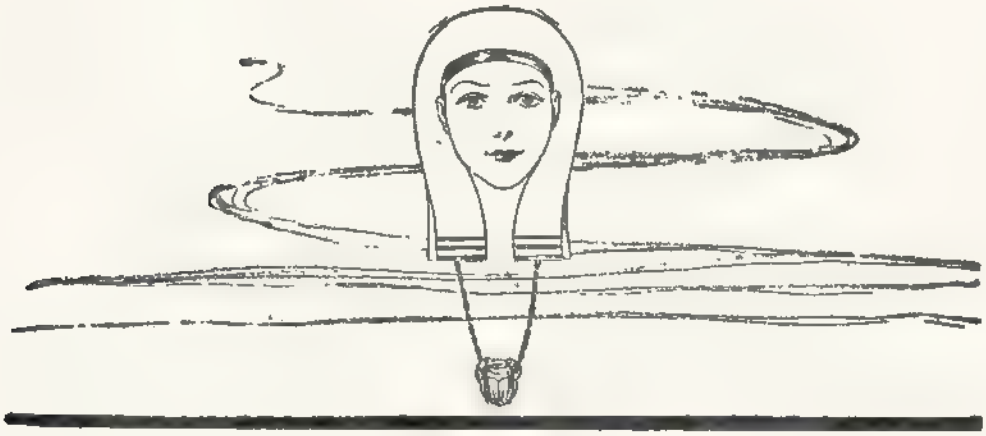
"Krake! Krake! Look out!" But my words were useless. Already his face was convulsed in death, and he was turning—blue!

I turned and fled. How I lived through that night of agony and horror, I do not know. Even now, the memory of it sears my soul as the burning flint-rock scorched the flesh of the dancers. I ran, with the Thing at my heels—I crawled, with the Thing crouching over me—I screamed aloud to it to let me alone!

My only guide was the river, but somehow, I found the clearing. When I came out, I was mad—and then—I forgot. . . .

MONTHS afterward, when I could talk, I told my story. I would not have been believed if it had not been for the stones, which bore me witness with their cold, blue light. I had seen what no other man had ever lived to tell of—the deadly poison-carrier at her work. I had seen the ceremony of inoculation—a ceremony which was begun with the birth of the girl chosen as a tribal weapon, and continued at regular intervals during her life, so that eventually she reeked of the virulent poison which had been slowly injected into her veins, giving her the kiss of Death.

I had seen the Thing in the Bush!



The Picture

By FRANCIS FLAGG

Crazy Jim was a hobo, shunned by his associates of the road as a bit cracked, but he attained to power unthinkable and dominated the destinies of nations

THE room was in complete darkness. "O Liam Maroo," chanted the man. The blackness was like a thick velvet against his face. He spoke the words that for twenty thousand years no human voice had uttered. Far off, in an infinity of night, grew a red spot, lurid, uncanny to behold. The man shuddered. Almost he dashed to pieces the fragile contrivance that for three weeks, night after night, in this miserable room, he had brought to completion. But his will conquered. In a voice almost inaudible he said the seven necessary words and made the seven unspeakable motions. The red spot grew, expanded. In the center of the red spot formed a face, a terrible face, an *unhuman* face, the face of Liam Maroo, the World Ancient. "I am here," said the face.

The man fought the faintness that threatened to engulf his senses. "O Liam Maroo," he whispered, "the deed has been done, the altar raised. For seven nights I have conjured you by the seven necessary words, and the seven unspeakable motions. Speak, have I not fulfilled the ancient bargain?"

"You have fulfilled," said the face.

"Then by the Book of Him Who First Conjured, I call upon you to fulfill yours."

"It is well," said the face. "What is your wish?"

"Power," answered the man. "Power. I who have been weak, would be strong. I who have been poor and lowly, would be high and mighty. I who have known the contempt of men, would know their envy and servility. I who have known poverty and hunger, would know riches and plenty. Give me power."

His voice at last rang like a trumpet, growing stronger with every word uttered, and he leaned forward in his eagerness until in front of him the invisible contrivance creaked and swayed.

"Power," said the face thoughtfully. "Would it not be better to do as Suliman, and ask nothing but wisdom?"

"Nay," said the man. "Suliman was already a king, and rich. Wisdom added to power and riches made him greater. But without power even Wisdom can die in the gutter."

"True," said the face; "and by the choice you make you prove yourself already wise. You would have power, power to sway men, power to create and hold riches. It is well. Such power is yours, such power I endow you with—but at a price."

"My soul?" said the man. "It is yours; take it."

"Soul!" echoed the face. "Whom do you take me for—Mephistopheles? Only the Antagonist could barter for your soul. To me it is worthless. Not your soul."

"Not my soul," echoed the man. "Then name what you will."

The unhuman face of Liam Maroo regarded the man intently. "Power, riches, the magnetism that sways men, all these I give you, and in return you shall pay to me the woman you love."

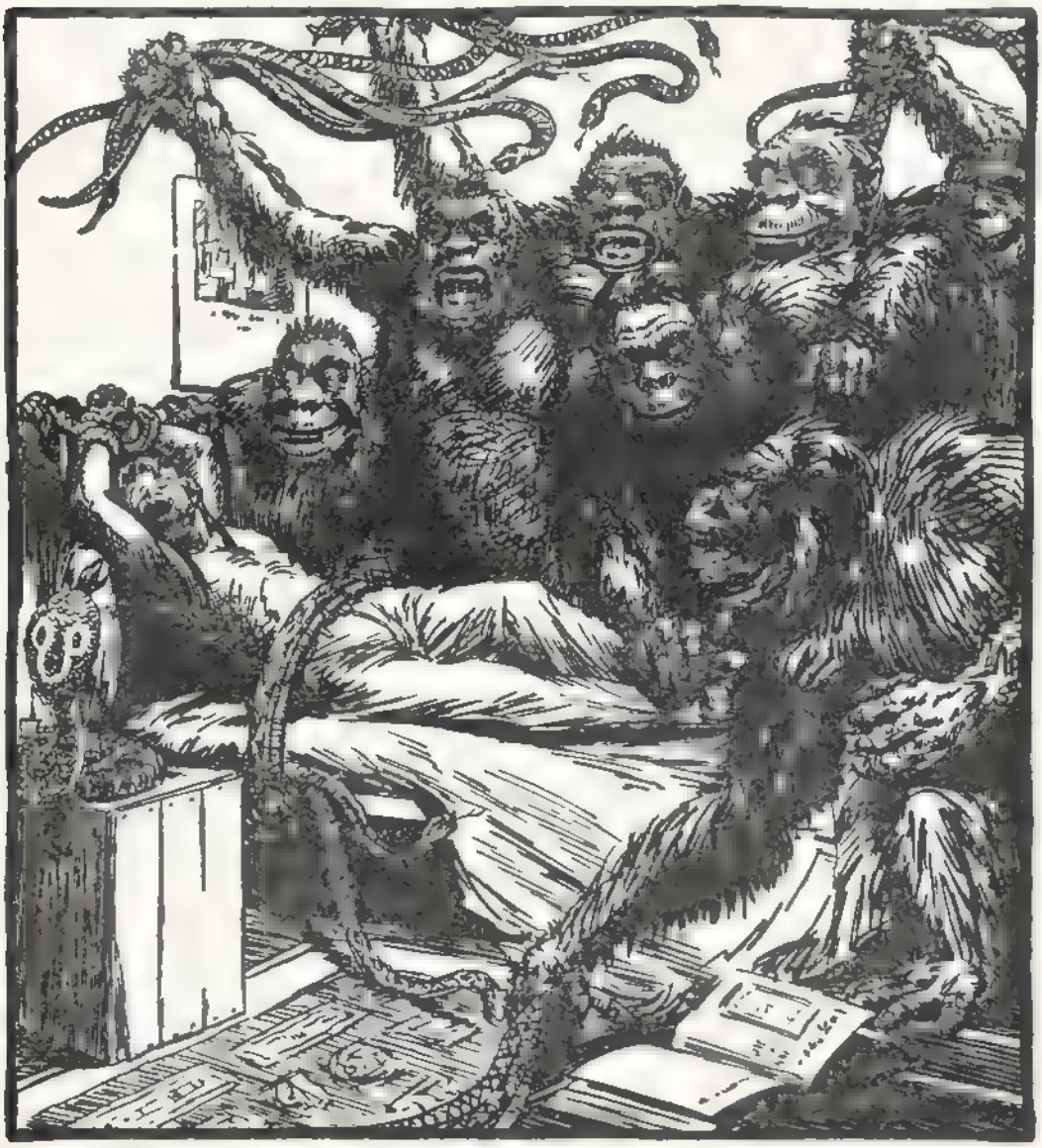
"The woman I love! But I love no woman," said the man.

"You will," said the face. "If you accept my offer you are fated to meet her.

This, then, is the price I ask; that at the time I choose you shall sacrifice to me her brain, and her heart, and——"

The man listened to the last horrid detail of the sacrificial rite and shuddered. In the deep darkness his cheeks blanched, and for a moment he hesitated. But the overwhelming ambition that had driven him to master the secret of the Book of Him Who First Conjured, that had nerved him, in spite of superstitious fears, to raise the altar, practise the awful and uncanny ritual, would not now let him retreat. What! to forego his heart's desire for a woman he did not as yet know and for whom he cared nothing? "I accept," he said hoarsely. "The woman is yours."

Was it pity that flitted across the re-



"The man was bound with serpents, one of which knew Eve."

mote, unhuman countenance of Liam Maroo?

"Think well," said the face warningly.

"I have thought," said the man.

"Let the pact be signed," said the face.

Then followed a ceremony that can never be described in words. The red spot grew until it filled the room with its lurid glow. The troglodytes came, and the three things of which Radge Oep speaks in that book which no one now understands. The man was bound with the serpents, one of which knew Eve. He was scourged with seven whips fashioned of scorpions. Then came The Horns and pierced him in a secret spot. After that . . .

But it is well to be silent. In time the red light went as it had come. The room was dark. Dawn came, and the sun shone over the roof-tops and through the single window of the room and revealed its squalid meagerness. There was nothing to see, save a soap-box on end, seven pieces of shaving, a chalked diagram on the floor, and the body of a man lying heavy in sleep across a sagging bed.

2

The rise of Jim James to wealth and power was phenomenal, even for that traditional land of opportunity and of startling financial successes, America. Carnegie rose from poor boy to steel magnate; Rockefeller from obscure clerk to millionaire oil baron; Henry Ford developed the cheap automobile industry and became one of the uncrowned kings of business. But sensational as were the financial successes of these men there was nothing mysterious about them. One could follow the process of their emergence from comparative poverty to money masters, over a period of years. But at thirty-five Jim James was working as a dishwasher in the kitchen of O Come Inn restaurant on Congress Avenue, Tucson, Arizona, for twelve dollars a week. This was in the spring of 1930. He was then a thin-faced, slender, dried-up wisp of a man weighing no more than a hundred and twenty pounds. His chin habitually showed a stubble of dirty-black beard and he went clad in a shapeless pair of trousers, frayed at the bottoms, and in a khaki shirt, shiny on the bosom and far from clean. Before that he had been a tramp, a bindlestiff, a laborer in the oil fields, an insignificant migratory worker whom people spoke of —if they ever spoke of him at all—as slightly cracked. He was queer, in those days something of a butt. He never resented an insult, a sneer. He went his way, silent, almost furtive. Only his eyes showed any force, any vitality; but as he never looked anyone directly in the face, few noticed them. With him he always carried a book. It was the same book; an odd yellow-looking volume he had picked up God knows where. Always, in camps, in jungles, by the side of the roads, he was reading in this book. When he thought himself alone he would singsong certain unintelligible sentences in an alien gibberish. Also he would build strange little contrivances of sticks and stones and draw diagrams in the dust. Naturally this aroused the curiosity of his fellow hoboes. Several times men took the volume away from him and examined it, only to find the printing fine and in unintelligible characters, with weird drawings and designs on alternate pages that suggested nothing to them save that he who could be interested in such truck must be daffy. So they threw the book back to him with good-natured oaths and gibes. Seemingly, Jim James never resented these outrages. He surrendered the book without struggle, received it back with no audible comment, and in time men ceased bothering him. So much of his life is authentic. But before that, who he was, where he came from,

is shrouded in mystery. Then came the spring of 1930, the dish-washing job, and the first of the mysterious happenings which in a few weeks was to lift this vagabond, this insignificant menial and reputed daft person out of poverty and squalor and make him one of the most envied and talked-of persons in America, in time of the world.

He was late for work that morning. Usually he was at the dishpan by seven. But it was nine when he came through the café door. Matt Dowden, the stout, big-stomached proprietor, intended to bawl him out. But the irate words died in his throat. Even Matt Dowden could see that there was some magical change in his erstwhile dish-washer. For the first time he experienced the sensation of having Jim James look at him levelly with those strange vital eyes of his.

"I'm quitting the job, Matt," he said in soft, easy tones.

This was another surprize. Jim James had seldom spoken, but when he did he had addressed his employer haltingly, and always as "sir" or "mister." If the dog lying at the door had raised up and bellowed, "Hello, Matt," Matt Dowden couldn't have been more thunderstruck.

"You see," said Jim James conversationally, "I've struck it rich. Yes, gold. Up the street a ways. I'm on my way now to file my claim at the court-house. What do you think of that for a nugget, Matt?"

He threw on the counter a dull glittering mass the size of a large cobblestone. Matt Dowden could scarcely believe his eyes. He picked it up. The thing was surprizingly heavy.

"Keep it," said Jim James indifferently and walked out.

By noon everyone in Tucson knew that Jim James had discovered and filed on a gold mine in a downtown lot back of his lodging-house. At first there was nothing but laughter. Who ever heard of gold in the heart of town? Undoubtedly the man was crazy. But when he began to flood the local assay offices with fabulously rich nuggets, with canvas bags of almost pure gold-dust, opinion changed. In a few days one of the big mining companies had its men on the claim making tests, analyzing the soil, judging the richness of the find. Their reports were breath-taking. The mine was a regular bonanza, incredibly rich. There were millions in it—millions! The newspapers ran screaming headlines:

"GOLD STRIKE IN TUCSON!"

Business men forgot their business. A rush was made to file on any and everything. From all over the West foot-loose adventurers stampeded into Tucson in one of the most remarkable gold-rushes in history. The big mining company made a cash offer of two hundred thousand dollars to Jim James. Jim James said he wasn't interested. They made it a million. He laughed. "Two million," he said, "not a cent less." So inside of two weeks they bought him out, and the erstwhile bum and dish-washer was now twice a millionaire.

But no sooner was the mine sold than a strange thing happened. Gold ceased to be found on the fabulously rich claim. True, mining engineers had sunk their shafts twenty feet into the soil, through sand and quartz almost solid gold. They had assayed this gold at staggering figures to the ton. But the day after the deal was consummated with Jim James the mine proved to contain nothing but worthless sand and rock. The gold had vanished. The experts could hardly believe their senses. A cry was raised that Jim James had deliberately salted the claim, that he defrauded the mining company out of its purchase price. But there were reports of the chemists and engineers to disprove such charges. How could a poor dish-washer salt a claim for twenty feet into

the earth? The gold taken from the claim and still existent ran into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. No, there had been gold in the claim, a small fortune in gold, but the mining experts had overestimated its extent and the lead had petered out. This became the consensus. The mining company finally pocketed its loss, the gold-seekers left town, the business men returned to their businesses. Only the newspapers were heralding the appearance, on the financial stage of the country, of the unique and even mysterious figure of one, Jim James, ex-dishwasher and migratory worker.

3

THE startling change in the fortunes of Jim James was no more startling than the change in the man himself. Even during the two weeks of the gold rush people noticed this sudden metamorphosis in the insignificant dish-washer. He did not, of course, grow in height, but the straightening of his stooped shoulders, the erect way in which he now carried himself, gave the impression of increased stature. He was almost as self-contained, as silent as ever, but from him exuded a force, a dynamic strength, that was a revelation to those who had known him previously. "It is incredible," muttered Matt Dowden, "incredible!"

When Jim James had need to speak he spoke softly, without hesitation, his dark eyes fixed unswervingly on those of the people with whom he spoke. When addressing persons in front of him he gave the uncanny impression of looking directly into the face of each individual at one and the same moment. Yet he made no attempt to change his manner of living, wore the same shapeless trousers and greasy shirt. There were men who had met him on the road, shifty-eyed yeggs and gay-cats who, remembering him as he had been, thought they would blow into town and relieve the old fool of the proceeds of his lucky strike. But they departed after a few days, thoroughly mystified and no richer than when they had come. One or two old-timers he staked with a few dollars. A Mexican who had fed him from time to time was presented with a deed to the small ranch he rented. A few kindnesses of this sort Jim James performed; then one day, still clad in his disreputable clothes, but bearing on his person certain papers of value, he swung aboard an east-bound train and was gone from his old haunts.

Chicago heard of him next. In fact it was in the windy city, the metropolis on the Great Lakes, that he performed the second feat which electrified the world. This was nothing less than to discover a diamond mine in the great dumps which lie in the stockyards section of the city. Now everyone knows that the diamond is a mineral of great hardness, consisting of crystallized carbon, and found only in certain favorable soils. But in vain diamond experts protested that it was preposterous to talk of mining the precious stone anywhere in Illinois. Jim James was now a wealthy man. He purchased most of the dumps, including the mineral rights, surrounded his land with armed guards, and proceeded to take out diamonds in spite of the verdict of the experts. Diamonds began to appear on the local markets by the bucketful; they circulated to New York, Boston. Dealers in precious stones were dumfounded. The charge was made that the jewels were paste. But Jim James smiled at this. By every test imaginable the gems were proved genuine. Then it was asserted that they were being manufactured by a chemical process. Diamonds have been so produced, but only through extreme heat and pressure, small in size and far from perfect, and at prohibitive cost. Jim James

exploded this theory by inviting chemists and jewelers to his lot and showing them the crude stones. The experts were astounded. The soil was of the kind in which diamonds had never been found, the geological conditions were all unfavorable, yet in spite of these self-evident facts stones were there in profusion, stones in such quantities as to stagger belief. Jim James was flooding the market with them. People whose fortunes were tied up in these precious gems became panic-stricken.

As is well known, diamonds are plentiful enough, but their output is regulated to maintain the price. The International Diamond Trust, the Beers of Africa, became alarmed. All over the civilized world Jim James and his wonderful find were headline news. The price of diamonds began to drop. There was only one thing for the diamond trust to do. They dared not have an inexhaustible supply of precious gems in the hands of irresponsible people. Jim James must be brought into the syndicate or his mine purchased. The latter was what was done. The sum paid to Jim James was never made public but the newspapers placed it anywhere from ten million to fifty. Then came another sensation. No sooner was the deal with Jim James consummated than the diamond mine petered out! The trust found itself in possession of a lot, a hole in the ground, and so much worthless rubble. Having more stones than they knew what to do with from their African and other mines, this did not altogether displease the trust officials. They were angry, of course; they figured that Jim James in some clever and incomprehensible way had bilked them; they decided it was wise to be philosophical and say little. But the newspapers went wild. They connected up the gold-mine incident of Arizona with that of Chicago and turned out sensational story after story. "Jim James the Man of Mystery." "The Dish-washer with the Midas Touch." So the captions ran. And while the national and international press was broadcasting wilder and wilder news to an avid reading public, turning out lurid Sunday supplement articles by the carload, there happened a third incident which never reached the papers.

THERE is in the city of New York a world-famous street. It is the financial center of the nation, some claim of the world. And in this street is a magnificent office building housing the offices of the most powerful banking institution ever organized. The head of the house of Dorgan was the third of this line and was called Peter—a tall, thick-set, heavy-jowled man with iron-gray hair and despotic eyes. He had been born to a kingship more powerful and real than that of any six monarchs of Europe. His simple name was the awe of princes. His signature on pieces of paper swayed the destinies of nations. Millions of working-men, their happiness and jobs, lay under the soft but ruthless hand of this lord of banking. Wars were made, armies came and went, as his interest dictated. From the cradle up he had been educated and molded with but one purpose in view—the wielding of the autocratic power his money conferred. He was proud with the pride of an aristocrat; strong, with the strength of an especially tempered blade; pitiless, with the cool indifference of one who had never suffered poverty or want. This gentleman, then, this Peter Dorgan, this scion of a great banking family, was seated in his private office, thoughtfully pulling on a fragrant and very expensive cigar manufactured for his exclusive consumption, when his secretary, without previous warning, ushered into his presence a man, a visitor, a personage upon whom Peter Dorgan had never before set eyes.

To understand the sheer miracle of

such a thing happening, one must be made to realize the utter inaccessibility of the king of bankers. Easier would it be for a poor London cockney to win to the person of England's king in Buckingham Palace than for an ordinary man to have an audience with Peter Dorgan in his office. Even fellow bankers, men of importance in their way, governors, senators, found it next to impossible to arrange interviews with the money king. Between him and the importunities of the world stood a whole array of henchmen; only they were called doormen, clerks, office-boys, managers, presidents, and vice-presidents. But on the morning in question there had appeared in the general offices a soft-voiced, slender man who asked to see Peter Dorgan. He was moderately well-dressed in a dark sack suit. The hat, a brown velour, he carried in one hand. But it was his smile that was remarkable; that, and his eyes. Stony-faced and remote-appearing clerks found themselves unconsciously warming toward him under the influence of both. Crusty managers forgot to repel him in their usually chilly manner. So the stranger progressed from one clerk to another, from business manager to vice-president, always coming nearer his objective, until at last he stood in the anteroom of the great magnate's sanctum confronting one last obstacle—the money king's secretary.

"It is impossible," said the secretary. "Mr. Dorgan sees few people, and then only by special appointment. I can't understand how you have reached me. Someone will be sorry for this."

He stood up crisply and for the first time looked at the person addressed. The stranger smiled gravely. "I apologize for troubling you."

"Oh, it's no trouble, I assure you," returned the secretary quickly. He found himself liking this man. "Only Mr. Dorgan has made it an invariable rule——"

"A rule," said the stranger quietly, "that doesn't apply to me."

Like one under the influence of a hypnotic spell the secretary did an unprecedented thing. Without knocking at the door or first learning the will of his employer, he ushered the stranger into the presence of the latter. Peter Dorgan was astounded. Never had such conduct occurred before. "Bentley," he cried sharply, "what does this mean? Who is this man?"

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

"But I have no appointment with any gentleman this morning," frowned Peter Dorgan. "Certainly not with this one."

"But nevertheless, you are pleased to see me," said the stranger softly.

Peter Dorgan's imperious eyes met the level, vital ones of the stranger. At what he seemed to see in them his hard expression altered. Perhaps the cool assurance of the visitor's remark awoke his interest. Be the explanation what it may, he in turn did an unprecedented thing. He waved the secretary from the room and questioned abruptly, "What is your name?"

"Jim James," answered the stranger.

"Jim James," murmured the banker. "I have never——"

Then he gave a little start and his eyes narrowed.

"Ah," said the other quietly, "I see that you have heard of me."

"Could I help doing so when I read the papers?" smiled Peter Dorgan. "You are the man from the West, the dish-washer with the Midas touch."

"Yes," said Jim James, almost dreamily, yet with a suggestion of power that did not escape the magnate. "I have made two fortunes and can make a third and a fourth. Money? It is mine to command. Wealth? I can find it where I please. Power? I intend to have it—through you."

"Through me!"

"Yes, it is the easiest way. Without you I could still be powerful. If I wished

I could wrest from you the finacial supremacy of the world. Believe me, it is far better to have me with you than against you."

"You are very confident," said Peter Dorgan.

"With the consciousness of strength," answered Jim James.

The imperious eyes of one, the level, vital eyes of the other, clashed. Peter Dorgan knew men. It was his one outstanding talent. Besides, for the first time in his hard, self-contained life he felt himself under the sway of another's personality. He who usually dominated was being dominated; he who usually compelled others was himself being compelled. He was conscious of this sudden weakness in himself and yet felt impotent to combat it. As if he sensed the psychological moment, Jim James leaned forward and said: "Gold—it is everywhere. Look! under your hand the desk is solid gold; the walls of the room are gold; and the inkwell is a blood-red ruby!"

Peter Dorgan could scarcely credit the evidence of his eyesight. The dark, heavy-grained desk glittered yellow, the walls reflected the light in red-gold excrescences. And the inkwell? He picked it up. It lay on the palm of his hand like a great drop of blood.

"This is witchcraft," he muttered dazedly.

Jim James said softly: "Think what would happen to the world standard of wealth if gold were to be found as plentiful as sand; if gems and precious jewels became as common as pebbles. The bottom would fall out of the world market, the great financial lords would go down to ruin. What then of the House of Dorgan?" He said softly, "It would be smashed—like that."

There was silence. Peter Dorgan closed his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again the desk was nothing but a desk of heavy-grained wood, the walls their normal selves, and the inkwell that and nothing else.

"I suppose you know that I could have you declared insane, that——" He wavered to a stop. "What is it you desire?" he asked hoarsely. Jim James told him.

And that is how Jim James made his debut in the financial and social life of the country.

4

THE advent of Jim James on Wall Street created another sensation. Everywhere Peter Dorgan introduced him as his partner. He sat on the boards of powerful directorates, not alone as a member, but as a dictator of policies to whom even Peter Dorgan deferred. Men realized that in the person of the ex-hobo and dish-washer, had arisen another great money lord, a titan of business. His wealth grew to be immense, his power practically unbounded. Through it all his quietness, his simplicity of manner never changed. Then suddenly, within two years, he quit active business and began to travel. He travelled like an emperor. Paris knew him, and Berlin. In his personal attire he was, alternately, the form of fashion or the picture of poverty. If it pleased him to dress in the correct attire of a gentleman today, it also pleased him to go clad as a navvy tomorrow. But in any costume his manner never varied. That strange personality of his had the same effect whether he was clothed in broadcloth or rags. At Monte Carlo he twelve times broke the bank, playing any and every game, and then purchased the ruined casino for the price of his winnings. For three months he ran the place, taking the gamblers' money six days of the week and distributing it among the losers on the seventh. At the expiration of that time he sold the casino for a song and went on a hunting-trip to Africa. . . .

Jim James was now forty-one, slender, dynamic. Women, of course, he had known. A famous Polish actress had been his mistress for a few months and then shot herself when his fancy wandered. A noted Italian singer had loved him in vain. More than one beautiful woman of high birth and social position had yielded him her caresses. With a ruthlessness which promised nothing, asked for nothing but the pleasure of the moment, he had sated himself with soft arms and warm lips. But never had anything but his passing fancy been engaged. He would, he had sworn to himself, love no woman too much. Something having to do with the love of woman haunted him. It was related to that vague, terrifying dream of his; the dream he had had six years before in a desert city; the dream from which he had awakened conscious of latent forces stirring within himself. And before the dream there had been the book, the strange book over which he had pondered for years.

But he wasn't even sure of that. The book had vanished. And the dream was a recurring nightmare whose salient points ever eluded him. He was sure of only one thing: that he had been reborn in some miraculous fashion; that the timid, weak, spiritless creature who had been Jim James had given place to a dynamic, forceful one; that he who had tramped the roads, had mucked it in ditches, had servilely cringed to others and washed dishes for the right to live, was now a man of destiny; that whatever he willed would be his. Wealth, power, position—they were his for the asking, the finding. He felt it, he knew it. An inner voice spoke to him and he harkened to its counsel. The discovery of the gold mine did not surprize him; the incident of the diamond mine only made him more sure of his rapidly developing powers. At times fear of himself and his uncanny ability assailed him. That was at first. Then he began to enjoy its use. Under the dynamic drive of his will he went up and up. Men were swayed by his personality. He became a financial power. Great men were proud of his nod of recognition. Only within himself was the saving grace of something of the old Jim James, hobo, dishwasher. He remembered that old Jim James as if he had been a well-beloved but not over-respected brother. He recalled the futile dreams and wild longings of that early Jim James for wealth and position. He used to lie on the roadside with his dirty bundle of bedding and watch the sleek motor-cars of the rich glide by. And what was it that old Jim James used to do? He used to build strange contrivances of sticks and stones and mumble queer sentences. Those sentences came from the book. But there was no book. Jim James shook his head. It was useless trying to separate fact from fiction. No wonder people in those days had thought him daft. But those days were past. He was a power now. Only he did not wish to love a woman. Book or no book, danger lay in loving a woman. He swore he would never love a woman. Then at a formal function in Paris he met Margaret, Countess of Walgrave, a great English beauty with the blood, so it was said, of the unhappy Stuarts in her veins, and all his resolutions were dust.

THE countess was sitting in one of the chambers opening off the ballroom surrounded by a large circle of her admirers. She had just heard an incident regarding Jim James and his eccentricities of dress and conduct. An aristocrat by birth, a stickler for all the formality and dignity of her class, she gave her opinion of him in no uncertain terms.

"The man has proved himself a boor, an ignoramus, socially impossible."

"I believe," said one of the gentlemen, "that he is expected here tonight."

"Indeed! Then I trust no one presents him to me. I haven't any desire to make the acquaintance of such canaille no matter how wealthy. Why, it is common report that not so long ago the man was nothing but a navvy!"

"Yes, madam," said a quiet voice, "and a dish-washer, too. Surely you heard of the dish-washing?"

Jim James bowed in front of her, his slim figure correctly garbed in evening dress, continental style, his dark, vital eyes fixed on the countess' face.

"You know," he said in soft conversational tones, "I once blacked shoes a whole year in the city of Los Angeles for fifteen dollars a week and tips. Tips," he said dreamily, "nickels and dimes. How servile I could be for those tips!" He smiled reminiscently.

"And there was the time," he said, "when I was scullion in the kitchen of a California millionaire. But pardon me, I am forgetting my manners, talking of myself. Don't you dance, countess? Then may I have the pleasure——"

To no one's surprize more than her own the countess rose and put her small hand on his arm. They danced. The man danced divinely. Afterward they sat in a secluded part of the conservatory and talked. She didn't like Jim James, no; but neither was he the boor she had visualized him as being. Besides that, he fascinated her.

"So you think it unpardonable of me to dress now and then as I please? But consider: have I not the right to remind myself of the depths from which I have come? As for the rest, it is the humbler, weaker part of myself paying homage to the stronger—that is all." He dismissed the subject with a shrug of his shoulders. "But let us talk of something more pleasing, of yourself. Your hair in this light, how wonderful it looks; and your eyes. . . ."

Jim James went home that evening (or rather early morning) definitely in love, and with a gnawing pain in some secret place of his body. For the first time since his metamorphosis he felt despondent. "I will never see that woman again," he vowed. The pain bothered him, and in his sleep he dreamed, a nightmarish dream. Or had it been a dream? He drank his late morning coffee. After that he felt better. What nonsense was this about love being dangerous? When and where had he picked up such a superstition? How beautiful the countess was! Danger or no danger, he loved her. The thought of her was like a heady drink. Oh damn that dream! His nerves actually felt jumpy. But with an effort of his powerful will he calmed them.

That afternoon he called at the countess' Parisian home only to be informed she had hastily left Paris on the morning train, en route to England. For the countess herself had passed a disturbed night. The thought of Jim James haunted her. She was afraid of the man and the look of desire she had seen in his eyes. At the same time she felt herself swayed by his personality. Whatever this man wanted he would take. If he wanted her he would take her. He was ruthlessly strong and without mercy. All this she sensed intuitively. But she sensed more than this. He would take, not by force or violence, but with her consent. That was the terrifying reality. Better not to see him again, to flee to safety. So she passed over to England on the afternon boat, little dreaming that the great white airplane which flew over the steamer in midchannel was the pri-

vate plane of Jim James bearing him to London.

The countess hadn't been in her town house twenty-four hours, when a slim man in English tweeds rang the entrance bell.

"My lady is in the morning room," said the butler. "If you will please wait until I announce you——"

But the visitor brushed past him with a pleasant smile.

"The morning room, yes. Right ahead? Do not bother, I can find it myself."

The countess looked up, startled, to see Jim James walk into the room. His coming coincided with certain thoughts of hers, for she had been thinking of him. He wasted no time on explanations. With both arms about her, his lips against her cheek (she was somewhat taller than himself), he said chidingly: "Margaret, Margaret, what is the use of running away from me?"

There was no use; she had probably always subconsciously been aware of the fact; yet she struggled in his imprisoning arms.

"You mustn't! It's impossible!"

He held her closer. "Say you love me."

"No—yes—oh, I don't know; I'm not sure. . . ."

Six weeks later they were married.

It was a notable wedding. The groom's gift to the bride was a necklace of emeralds, each stone unrivalled for size and flawless splendor. The event revived all the dormant stories concerning Jim James. The tale of his miraculous rise to wealth and power was retold on two continents and in a thousand newspapers. Conservative estimates placed his fortune at well over a billion dollars. The richest man in the world, he was called, and Jim James alone knew for certain how true were the words.

5

And now Jim James was at the very pinnacle of his stupendous career. Wealth, power, love, all were his. From the woman he loved he compelled love by the sheer force of his dynamic personality. But this compulsion of affection troubled the countess. She was not unhappy. She would have maintained—and with truth—that she loved her husband. But there were times when certain acts of his appalled her. Jim James could be uncouth in his manner. Sometimes his speech was far from grammatical. In his presence those things became negligible; but when she sat by herself she recalled them and they troubled her. As for Jim James, in spite of the fullness of his love, he was not happy. Since the first night of meeting the countess he had been conscious of a dull gnawing pain in some secret part of his body. With the pain came a tendency to dream. Night after night he dreamed, and from those dreams wakened with the fearful impression that some unimaginable horror threatened the woman he loved. The great doctors he consulted could give him no relief. In a certain part of his body was found a curiously shaped scar. How had it gotten there? Jim James could not remember. He strove to recollect when he had incurred it. In vain. As for the dreams, he only knew that they were hideous, that they related to his past. Something sinister came when he slept and it whispered, whispered . . . what did it whisper? The name of his wife. Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow. It was madness! What in the name of God could threaten his wife? He stared at his face in the glass. Was he, the great Jim James, going mad? With an effort he schooled himself to be his quiet, assured self. But more frequently, when

alone, the mask slipped and he gave himself over to fits of terrible depression.

At first Jim James did not understand the exact nature of what he feared. In an unostentatious way he surrounded his wife with a thousand safeguards. Trustworthy attendants went with her everywhere. Keepers with loaded rifles kept the walks and the woods of his country mansion under constant surveillance. His own secret-service men watched over his party when they travelled. Such precautions did not irk the countess nor surprize her. After all, Jim James, in his way, was a king, a powerful ruler, and she was his consort. Great personages always had armed retainers, and she was pleased with the sense of power and importance they conveyed. So things went for the first year of married life. Then happened that which helped to bring all the vague dreams and terrors of months to a weird climax.

Toward the last of that year Jim James had grown afraid of things that glowed. He had to steel himself against the sight of flame in open fireplaces, of illumination in electric bulbs. They reminded him of a far-off spot he had once seen. Something terrible, menacing, lurked behind a red spot. Almost, at times, he could see it.

He went to bed that night in complete darkness. Even in his sleep he was conscious of the dull gnawing pain in his body. He dreamed—or was it a dream? He wakened from it as usual, sitting up in bed, his forehead beaded with perspiration. Through the window at the end of the room a yellow fragment of moon shone. Thank God, he had only been dreaming! What was it in the nightmare that had tendered him a book? But there was no book. He switched on the nightlight at the head of his bed and went to rise. Even as he did so he saw the thing which lay on the coverlet. It was a strange volume, yellow as if with time, and opened at a certain page. Like one petrified in a half-rising position he glared at the book, and as he glared a few sentences of the finely printed and hieroglyphic-like characters leapt out at him like a blow.

For he whose body has been pierced in a secret spot by the horns of Om Nam, lo, from henceforth, is he an altar, a gateway from the past to the future, for the coming of the World Ancient.

(A half-witted tramp crouching by the roadside reading a book and making strange contrivances out of sticks and stones. A dish-washer brooding over a steaming sink and washing greasy dishes. A room in a cheap lodging-house and a man raising up a strange altar. Velvet blackness against a white, terrified face, and a shaking voice intoning, "O Liam Maroo. . . .")

It all came back. The vague, terrifying dream was a dream no longer. *And in return you shall pay . . . the woman you love.*

"Margaret! Margaret!" screamed the man.

What fiend had ever driven him to such a bargain? For wealth, for power, whispered a voice. But weighed in the scales against the life and safety of the woman he loved, how infinitesimal were wealth and power! Before a hair of her head were injured he would die!

Die . . . yes, that was the solution. Even the World Ancient would be powerless to make a dead man fulfil the dread pact. *He* was the altar, *he* was the gateway, and without him——

The gleaming steel paper-knife lay on the writing-desk. He picked it up. Its sinuous length shone. With steady hand he placed the pointed metal against his heart. One steady push, one powerful thrust. . . . But the blade curled; it was so much paper. With a curse he flung the useless weapon to the floor and sought

for the revolver in a drawer of the dresser. That would do the trick. Thank God, Margaret slept soundly. Two heavy doors were closed between him and her. The revolver was but a toy automatic in size but no less deadly at short range. Its discharge made little noise. The sound would not alarm her. He thought of the slim whiteness of her neck and the proud pale beauty of her face. The barrel of the revolver lay cold against the spot between his eyes. One pressure of the finger. . . .

Perhaps twenty seconds elapsed after he had pulled the trigger before he became conscious of the fact that the weapon held pressed against his forehead was an impotent thing.

Again he pulled the trigger—again—a half-dozen times. Was that laughter he heard?

Suddenly he flung the revolver from him with a stifled cry. He understood. Death was denied him. Between him and self-destruction lay a power that forbade. He was lost, lost! Margaret was doomed! For a moment he sank on the bed and surrendered to utter despair. Then summoning every last atom of his formidable strength he stood up to confront that which was coming.

For the room had darkened. Stygian gloom enwrapped him round. Even the moon had faded from the window, and the window gave no softer blackness against the prevailing gloom. Far off in the infinity of night grew a red spot, lurid, uncanny to behold. In the center of the red spot appeared a face, a terrible face, an *unhuman* face.

"I am here," said the face.

Jim James was on his knees, his hands outstretched.

"O Liam Maroo!" he cried, "mercy, mercy!"

The indescribable face regarded him without passion.

"The bargain was made; the pact sealed; I have come to demand of you the price."

"No, no!" cried Jim James wildly.

"The price," said the face inexorably.

Jim James threw himself on the floor. "Sacrifice me," he cried. "My life, my body, they are yours!"

"Nay," said the face, "I did not bargain for your life. Wealth, power, the ability to sway men, create riches, all these have you had, and have found them good. In return you promised to sacrifice the heart, the brain . . ."

"But I did not understand," cried Jim James.

"Understand!" said the face. "When have you mortals ever understood? Gladly you paid what you had still to possess. Speak! did you not deliberately, of your own accord, weigh power and wealth against love—and choose wealth?"

"Yes, yes! But I did not know what love could be. I had never loved. In my arrogance I thought never to love. Now I know."

The words echoed through the room. Did a shade of pity flash across that unhuman face? The lurid light grew greater. Jim James stared fearfully as massive limbs wavered in a mist of fire, as great curling claws reached out. He was conscious of only one thing, that somehow, someway, he must save the woman he loved. He was shouting, screaming, "O Liam Maroo, is there no other way to pay the price?"

And the face looking down on him said, "There is a way."

Then he rose to his feet, courage pouring into his shivering body, and asked, "What is the way?"

"That your wealth and honors be stripped from you."

"They are yours."

"Nor is that all. That you sink into the depths from which you rose."

"You mean——"

"That you shall become again what you were when you sought my help. Men shall despise you. Again you shall know the bitter pangs of squalor and poverty. All your wealth and power, your palaces and servants, your mighty friends and sycophants, shall pass from you like a dream, be as if they had never been."

"And my wife?" murmured Jim James.

"Shall cease to love you. The thing in you that holds her now, that makes her real in your existence, will be gone for ever. Nothing will be left to you of the golden present—nothing but a few bitter memories. Think!" cried the face, "think well before you choose. Sacrifice the woman and all that you now have shall still be yours."

"All except the woman."

"But there are other women. Women as fair, women more complaisant."

"But not *the* woman."

"No, not *the* woman. But again I ask you to consider carefully. Sacrifice yourself, all that you are, and were the woman to meet you she would despise you. She will have another lover. While you are swining it in the ditch, she will be living for another, lost to you. Think! What is your choice?"

The face of Jim James looked agonizedly into the inscrutable, unhuman one of Liam Maroo. What! never to know the soft rapture of Margaret's arms again, never to feel the warm pressure of her lips? What! to live in poverty and want while she became the beloved of another? Never! All the burning jealousy of the man woke to life, struggled like serpents in his bosom, scored his face with debasing lines. Better to see her dead—dead!

"Ah," breathed Liam Maroo.

Jim James started as if from an evil spell. He saw the slim whiteness of his wife's neck and the pale proud beauty of her face. Then he straightened up against an oppressive weight and cried hoarsely but in a strong voice:

"All that I have of wealth and power, take them—only spare the woman!"

6

In the city of Nogales, in the Mexican portion of that town which lies on the very borderline between Arizona and Sonora, there stands the American Saloon. Tourists from all over the United States visit this saloon. Within a few feet of the dry territory of Uncle Sam they can put a foot on a gleaming brass rail brought all the way from Forty-fifth Street, New York, and view themselves in a spotless expanse of mirror behind the bar. They can order small glasses of Scotch or big schooners of beer and listen to Big Pat Durfee bewail the carefree days when Manhattan was still wet and flowing over with licensed cheer. Also they can sometimes observe the person who is responsible for the gleaming polish on the brass rail and the spotlessness of the vast expanse of mirror. This is a slender, dried-up wisp of a man weighing no more than a hundred and twenty pounds. His chin habitually shows a stubble of dirty-black beard and he is clad in frayed, shapeless trousers and a khaki shirt far from clean. This individual goes his way, silently, furtively. Few notice him. If anyone does and makes inquiries, Big Pat answers, "Just an old bum that blew in. A bit cracked in the head, I guess. We call him Crazy Jim."

The Tree-Man

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

A tale of the Virgin Islands—the Blacks who came from Dahomey brought their eery superstitions with them

MY FIRST sight of Silvio Fabricius, the tree-man, was within a week of my first arrival on the island of Santa Cruz not long after the United States had purchased the Danish West Indies and officially renamed its new colony "The Virgin Islands of the United States."

On that occasion, which is a number of years ago, the ship on which I was travelling down to the islands came into Frederiksted Harbor, on the west coast of the island, just at dusk. I saw a half-moon of white sand-beach with the charming little town in its middle, and I was entranced. I had the feeling of "coming home," which was strange enough because it was my first sight of the island whereon my residence has been ever since except when I come north summers or spend the winter on St. Thomas, the chief island of the group where the capital town and the U. S. Naval Station are located.

In the midst of the bustle aboard ship incident to anchoring in the roadstead there came over the side an upstanding gentleman in a glistening white drill uniform with shining brass buttons. This gentleman came up to me, bowed in a manner to commend himself to kings, and said:

"I am honored to welcome you to Santa Cruz, Mr. Canevin. I am Director Despard of the police department. It is my privilege to place the police boat at your disposal when you are ready to go ashore. May I be of any assistance in seeing that your luggage is cared for?"

This was a welcome indeed, and decidedly unexpected. Beyond the fact that I was to live here for perhaps a year, had engaged a house by long-distance communication, and had notified the persons with whom I transacted this necessary business of the date of my arrival, no one, I supposed, had ever heard of me, Gerald Canevin, a young fellow quite obscure and without in those days even that evanescent recognition which comes —and goes—in the case of a writer of fiction and informative articles.

I was, as you can imagine, surprized. To put it mildly, I was simply knocked off my feet by such a reception on the part of this magnificent official whose courtesy was easily matched by his aristocratic appearance.

I thanked Director Despard in carefully chosen phrases, and before many minutes, and wholly because of his solicitous kindness, my four trunks were overside, my various articles of hand-luggage were bestowed in the police-boat waiting at the ladder gangway, and I was seated beside him in the boat's stern-sheets, he holding the tiller ropes, while four coal-black convicts rowed us ashore with tremendous pulls at their long sweeps.

Through the dusk I observed that the landing-wharf was crowded with Black people. Behind these there stood half-a-dozen knots of White people, conversing together. Along the background of waterfront buildings stood, parked, some thirty or forty cars. I remarked to the Police Director:

"Is it usual for so many persons to be

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"Those Blacks danced and pounded drums and burned flares."

on the docks at the landing of a vessel, Mr. Director?"

"It is not usual," replied the dignified gentleman beside me. "It is for you, Mr. Canevin."

"For me?" said I, and again, stultified, feeling that I was like a person playing without notice a strange part in some gorgeous comedy, "What—my dear sir—certainly not for me. Why——"

"Yes, it is for you, Mr. Canevin," Mr. Despard's beautifully modulated voice reassured me. "You are Captain McMillin's great-nephew, you know, my dear sir."

So that was it: my great-uncle, who had "been a planter" on Santa Cruz, and who had been, at that moment, before Mr. Despard had enlightened me, about the last person in my mind.

Arriving smartly at the concrete jetty, Mr. Despard and I landed and in what

was left of the daylight I perceived that confronting us and massed together in orderly fashion enough, were perhaps a thousand Negrões. Back of these stood the various groups of White People which I have mentioned, and which were made up, as I was to learn, of practically all the island's landed gentry.

We started along the jetty toward the thronged Negroes and I perceived that their interest—the African is usually quite naïve in such affairs—was entirely genuine. I began to get some glimmerings of the quality of the community which I was now seeing for the first time. . . .

After being received by the people who had come to meet me, I was installed in a small private hotel pending the preparations to my own hired residence. I found every house on Santa Cruz open to me. Hospitalities were showered upon me to the point of embarrassment. Kindnesses galore, considerate bits of information, help of every imaginable kind, ushered my quasi-permanent residence as a transplanted Santa Crucian to a delightfully successful culmination as a member of the inner circle of Santa Crucian society.

I had come because our government had entrusted me with a minor mission—lying wholly outside the scope of this narrative—and I had been advised that its successful prosecution should occupy, normally, about a year. Because of the doors opening before me, the silent cooperation here, the expert, whole-hearted guidance there, this mission of mine was fulfilled at the end of precisely nine weeks from the date of my arrival on Santa Cruz.

I LEARNED, almost at once, many details about my great-uncle, Captain the Honorable William McMillin, which information was almost entirely new to me.

It was, naturally, not long after I had arrived on the island that I went to visit his estate, Great Fountain. I went with Hans Grumbach, in his Ford car, a bumpy journey occupying more than three hours, because this took us not only up hills and through ravines and along precipitous trails, but because the roads were incredibly roundabout.

All the way Hans Grumbach talked about this section of the island, now almost never visited. Hans, in his younger days, had lived up here as the last of the long line of resident managers which the old estate had known since the day, in 1879, when my relatives had sold their land. It was now, after several changes of hands, the property of the largest of the local sugar-growing corporations, known as the Copenhagen Concern, and, because of its inaccessibility, cultivation there had finally been abandoned. Then Hans Grumbach had come to live in Frederiksted; where, having married one of Mrs. Heidenklang's daughters, and so allied himself to a most respectable *creole* family, he had settled down to the keeping of a store in the town.

But, it appeared, Hans had wanted, for ten years, to go back. This trip toward the old place stimulated him, and he sang its praises, a process which I spare my readers. It was, according to this panegyrist, incredibly fertile at Great Fountain. One needed, according to Hans, merely "to stick some seed in the ground, anywhere," and it would "grow and flourish there" like the shamrock on old Ireland's sod!

We arrived at last. I had never, of course, seen the estate land before, but it required no sympathetic assurances on the part of my voluble guide to realize its amazing fertility.

We walked over the nearer and more accessible portions of the old estate, and, as it lay in a great cup of table-land here

in the north-central hills of the island, we also looked out over its domain from various angles. The ancient estate was in a sad state of rack and ruin. The village was about half tumbled down, and even the cabins that remained were out of repair. The characteristic tropical inroads upon land "turned out," that is, out of organized cultivation, were apparent everywhere. Everything except the sporadic cultivation of occasional vegetable patches and one good-sized grove of banana trees was overrun and choked with rank weeds. The ancient farm buildings, although soundly constructed of stone and brick, were likewise terribly dilapidated, and there was only the word of Hans and of the caretaker to account for the site of my great-uncle's Great House, the very foundations of which had disappeared.

I had on this visit to Great Fountain, my first experience with what has come to be known as the "grapevine" method of communication among Africans. I had been perhaps four days on the island, and it is reasonably certain that few of its people had ever so much as heard of me before; certainly none of these obscure village Negroes cut off here in the hills from others the nearest of whom lived miles away. Yet we had hardly come within a stone's long throw of the remains of the village before we were surrounded by the total population, of perhaps twenty adults, and at least as many children of all ages.

As one would expect, these Blacks were of very crude appearance; not only "country Negroes" but that in exaggerated form. Negroes in the West Indies have some tendency to live on the land where they originated, and, as it happened, most of these Negroes had been born up here and several generations of their forebears before them.

All the adult Negroes knew Grumbach from his long residence here up to ten years or so previously as manager, but to him they paid scant attention. They crowded about me in much the same way as the Negroes at the wharf at the time of my arrival, only, somehow, in a cruder, more outspoken fashion. "English" though it is, I was at that period of my residence quite unable to understand their speech. The Black people talked to me and *at* me in the friendliest fashion imaginable, and Hans Grumbach, when it seemed desirable for me to speak, prompted me.

I had come prepared with a double handful of small-change. This I handed over to the oldest man of the villagers, requesting him to distribute it among them all, and I was gravely blessed for this *largesse*. Translating the comments of the group on this present which my instinct as a member of the old Captain's family prompted me to make to the descendants of his estate-people, later, on the way home, Grumbach told me that they had compared me to my collateral ancestor!

After lunch, Grumbach took me to see the "fountain" from which the old estate had originally derived its title.

We walked up a ravine toward it, along a sandy stream-bed which, this being an exceptionally dry season near the end of a three-years' drought, was now a mere trickle.

The "fountain" itself was a delicate, natural waterfall, coming thinly over the edge of a high rock, source of the one unfailing stream on an otherwise very "dry" island.

It was when we were coming back, by a slightly different route, for Grumbach wanted me to see everything possible, that I saw the tree-man. He stood, a youngish, coal-black Negro, of about twenty-five years, scantily dressed in a

tattered shirt and a sketchy pair of trousers, about ten yards away from the field-path we were following and from which a very clear view of a portion of the estate was obtained, and beside him, towering over him, was a magnificent coconut palm. The Negro stood, motionless. I thought, in fact, that he had gone asleep standing there, both arms clasped about the tree's smooth, elegant trunk, the right side of his face pressed against it.

He was not, however, asleep, because I looked back at him and his eyes—rather intelligent eyes, they seemed to me—were wide open, although to my surprize he had not changed his position, nor even the direction of his gaze, to glance at us; and, I was quite sure, he had not been in that village group when we had stood among them just before our lunch.

Grumbach did not speak to him, as he had done to every other Negro we had seen. Indeed, as I turned to him for some possible comment, I saw that his face looked a trifle—well, apprehensive; and, I thought, he very slightly quickened his pace. I stepped nearer to him as we walked past the man and the tree, and then I noticed that his lips were moving, and when I came closer I observed that he was muttering to himself. I said, very quietly, almost in his ear:

"What's the matter with that fellow, Grumbach?"

Grumbach glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, and my impression that he was disturbed grew upon me.

"He's listening!" was all that I got out of Grumbach. I supposed, of course, that there was something odd about the fellow; perhaps he was slightly demented and might be an annoyance; and I supposed that Grumbach meant to convey that the young fellow was "listening" for our possible comment upon him and his strange behavior. Later, after we had said good-bye to the courteous caretaker and he had seen us off down the first hill-side road with its many ruts, I brought up the subject of the young Black fellow at the tree.

"You mentioned that he was listening," said I, "so I dropped the matter; but, why does he do that, Mr. Grumbach—I mean, why does he stand against the tree in that unusual manner? Why, he didn't even gee his eyes to look at us, and that surprized me. They don't have visitors up here every day, I understand!"

"He was listening—to his tree!" said Hans Grumbach, as though reluctantly. "*That* was what I meant, Mr. Canevin." And he drew my attention to an extraordinarily picturesque ruined windmill, the kind once used for the grinding of cane in the old days of "muscovado" sugar, which dominated a cone-like hill-side off to our left as we bumped over the road.

BETWEEN getting settled in my house, attending to the preliminary work of my mission, and fulfilling the almost numberless social engagements which crowded upon me, I can not say that I forgot about the tree-man, but, certainly, he and his queer behavior were anything but prominent in my mind. It was not until months later, when I had gained the confidence of Hans Grumbach, that that individual gave me any further enlightenment.

Then I learned that, along with his nostalgia for the life of an agriculturist, there was mixed in with his feelings about the Great Fountain estate a kind of inconsistent thankfulness that he was no longer stationed there! This intrigued me. I saw something of Grumbach and got rather well acquainted with him as the months passed that first year of my residence. Bit by bit, in his reluctant manner of speech, it came out.

To put the whole picture of his mind

on this subject together, I got the idea that Grumbach, while always suffering from a faint nostalgia for his deep-country residence and the joys of tilling the soil, felt, somehow, *safe,* here in the town. If he chafed, mildly, at the restrictions of town life and his storekeeping, there was yet the certainty that "something"—a vague matter at first, as it came out—was not always hanging over him; something connected with a lingering fear.

The Negroes, up there at Great Fountain, were not, it seemed, quite like the rest of the island's Black population. No —the Great Fountain village was, somehow, at least in Hans Grumbach's dark hints, different; *sui generis,* "a peculiar people" as the biblical phrase runs.

They were, to begin with, almost purely of Dahomeyan stock. These Dahomeyans had drifted "down the islands" —in the general southerly direction; that is, from Haiti, beginning soon after the revolt from France in the early Nineteenth Century. They were tall, very dark-skinned, extremely clannish Blacks. And, just as the Koromantyn slaves in British Jamaica had brought to the West Indies their Obay-i ("obeah") or herb-magic, so, it seemed, had the Dahomeyans carried with them their *vodu,* which, properly defined, means the practises accompanying the vague Guinea worship of "The Snake."

This worship, grown into a vast localized *cultus* in unimpeded Haiti and in the Guiana hinterlands down in South America, is a vastly intriguing matter, very imperfectly understood even to this present day. But, its accompaniments; all the charms, *ouangas,* philtres, potions, talismans, amulets, "doctoring" and whatnot, have spread all through the islands and are thoroughly established in widely variant forms. Haiti is its West Indian home, of course. But down in French Martinique its extent and intensity is a fair rival to the Haitian supremacy. It is rife on Dominica, Guadeloupe, even on British Montserrat. Indeed, one might name every island from Cuba to Trinidad, and, allowing for the variations, the local preferences, and all such matters, one might say, and truly, that the *vodu,* generically described by the Blacks themselves as "obi," is very thoroughly established.

According to Grumbach, the handful of villagers at Great Fountain was very deeply involved in this sort of thing. Left to themselves as they had been for many years, forming a little, self-sustaining community of nearly pure-blooded Dahomeyans, they had, it seemed, reverted very nearly to their African type, and this, Grumbach alleged, was the fact despite their easy kindliness, their use of "English," and the various other outward appearances which caused them to seem not greatly different from other "country Negroes" on this island of Santa Cruz.

On the subject of Silvio Fabricius—for that was the tree-man's rather fanciful name—my information was derived directly from Grumbach. He had known the young Negro since he had been a pick'ny on the estate. He knew, so far as his limited understanding of Black People's magic extended, all about Silvio. He had been manager at the time the boy had begun his attentions to the great coconut palm. He had heard the to him "stupidness" which had attended the setting apart of this neophyte; in other words, there had been three days — and nights; particularly the nights—when not a single plantation-hand would do a piece of work for any consideration. It was, as he bitterly remembered it all, "the crop season." His employers, not sensing, businessmen as they were, any underlying reason for no work done when they needed the cane from Great Foun-

tain for their grinding-mill, had been hard on him. They had, in Santa Crucian phraseology, "pressed him" for cane deliveries. And there, in his village, quite utterly ignoring his authority as estate-manager, those Blacks had danced and pounded drums, and burned flares, and weaved back and forth in their interminable ceremonies—"stupidness"—for three strategic days and nights, over something which had Silvio Fabricius, then a rising pick'ny of twelve or thirteen, as its apparent center and underlying cause. It was no wonder that Hans Grumbach raved and probably swore mightily and threatened the estate-hands.

But—the expression of his anger and annoyance, the threats and cajolings, the offers of bonuses, "snaps" of rum, and pay for piece-work; all these efforts to get his ripe cane cut and delivered had come to nothing. The carts stood empty. The mules gravely ate the long guinea-grass. The cane-tops waved in the soft breath of the northeast trade wind, while those three days stretched themselves out to their conclusion.

This conclusion took place in the daytime, about ten o'clock in the morning of the fourth day, and after that, which was a very brief and apparently meaningless matter indeed, the hands sheepishly resumed the driving of their mule-carts and the plying of their canebills, and the Fountain cane travelled slowly down the rutted hill road toward the factory below. On that morning, before resuming their work, the whole village had accompanied young Silvio Fabricius as he walked ahead of them up toward the source of the perennial stream, stepped out into the field, and clasped his arms about a young, but tall and promising coconut palm which stood there as though accidentally, in solitary towering grandeur. There the villagers had left the little black boy when they turned away and filed slowly and silently back to the village and to their interrupted labor.

There, beside his tree, Grumbach said, Silvio Fabricius had stood ever since, only occasionally coming in to the village and then at any hour of the day or night, apparently "reporting" something to that same oldest inhabitant, a gnarled, ancient grandfather with pure white wool; after which brief visit he would at once, and with an unshaken gravity, return to his tree. Food, said Grumbach, was always carried out to him from the village. He toiled not, neither spun! There, day and night, under the blazing sun, through showers and drenching downpours, erect, apparently unsleeping—unless he slept standing up against his tree as Grumbach suspected—stood Silvio Fabricius; and there he had stood, except when he climbed the tree to trim out the "cloth" or chase out a rat intent on nesting up there, or to gather the coconuts, for eleven years.

The coconuts, it seemed, were his perquisite. They were, Grumbach said, absolutely *tabu* to anybody else!

Grumbach's attitude toward Silvio Fabricius was, it came out, one of fear! That his "fear" of this young Negro went deep I sensed. I was, later, to see my suspicion justified!

For a long time I had no occasion to revisit Great Fountain. But, six years later, while in the States during the summer, I made the acquaintance of a man named Carrington who wanted to know "all about the Virgin Islands" with a view to investing some money there in a proposal to grow pineapples on a somewhat large scale. I talked with Mr. Carrington at some length, and in the course of our discussions it occurred to me that Great Fountain estate would be virtually ideal for his purpose. Here was a very considerable acreage; the land, as I well

knew, was very rich; the Copenhagen Company would probably rent it out for a period of years for a very reasonable price, since it was bringing them in nothing.

I spread before Carrington these advantages, and he travelled down on the ship with me that autumn to make an investigation in person.

Carrington, a trained fruit-grower, spent a day with me on the estate, and thereafter with characteristic American energy started in to put his plan into practise. A lease was easily secured on terms mutually advantageous, the village was repaired and the fallen stone cabins rebuilt, and within a few weeks cultivating-machinery of the most modern type began to arrive on the Frederiksted wharf.

After a considerable consultation with Hans Grumbach, to whose lamentations over the restrictions of town life I had been listening for years, I recommended him to Mr. Carrington as manager of the laborers, and Hans, after going over the matter with his good wife and coming to an amicable arrangement, went back to Great Fountain, where a manager's house had been thrown up for him on the foundation of one of the ruined buildings. At Carrington's direction, Grumbach set the estate laborers at work on the job of repairing the roads, and, as the village cabins went up one after another, other laborers, enticed by the prospect of good wages, filled them up and ancient Great Fountain became once more a busy scene of simple industry.

During these preparatory works on the estate I was up there several times, because I was naturally interested in Joseph Carrington's venture being a success. I had, indeed, put several thousand dollars into it myself, not solely because it looked like a good investment, but in part for sentimental reasons connected with my great-uncle. On these occasions, being by then thoroughly familiar with the odd native speech, I made it a point to visit the village and talk at length with the "people." They were courteous to me, markedly so; "deferential" would be a better word to describe their attitude. This, of course, was wholly due to the family connection. Only a very few of them, and those the oldest, had any personal recollection of Captain McMillin, but his memory, aided by the folksong to which I have alluded, was decidedly green among them.

In the course of my studies of Negro matters, especially African manners and customs, which had included a wide course of reading, for I wished to master that abstruse subject, I had run across the peculiar affair of a "tree-man." I understood, therefore, the status of Silvio Fabricius in that queer little Black community; why he had been "devoted" to the tree; what were the underlying reasons for that strange sacrifice.

It was, on the part of that handful of nearly pure-blooded Dahomeyan villagers there at my great-uncle's old place, an attempt, a recrudescence perhaps—a revival, certainly—of a custom probably as old as African civilization. For—the African *has* a civilization. He is at a vast disadvantage when among Caucasians, competing as he necessarily must with Caucasian "cultures." His native problems are utterly different, utterly diverse, from the White Man's. The African's whole history among us Caucasians is a history of more or less successful adaptation. Place an average American businessman in the heart of "uncivilized" Africa, in the Liberian hinterland, for example, and what will he do—how survive? The answer is simple. He will perish miserably, confronted with the black jungle night, the venomous insect-life, the attacks of wild beasts, the basic problem of how to

feed and warm himself; for even this last is an African problem. African nights chill to the very bone. I know. I have been on *safari* in Uganda, in British East Africa, and in Somaliland, and I speak from experience.

Africans, supposedly static in cultural matters, have solved all these problems. And, very prominent among these, especially as it concerns the agricultural nations — for there are, perhaps, as many Black nations, kindreds, peoples, tongues, as there are Caucasian—is, of course, the question of weather.

Hence, the "tree-man."

Introduced with the ceremonies which were ancient when Hammurabi sat on his throne in Babylon, a young boy is dedicated to a forest tree. Thereafter he spends his life beside that tree, cares for it, loves it, "listens" to it, becomes "the-brother-of-the-tree" in time. He is "set apart." To the tree he devotes his entire life, dying at last beside it, in its shade. And—this is African "culture" if you will; a culture of which we Caucasians get, perhaps, the faint reactions in the, to us, meaningless jumble of Negro superstition which we sense all about us; the "stupidness" of the West Indies; faint, incomprehensible reflections of a system which, in itself, is practical, dogmatic, and utilitarian.

These Negroes at Great Fountain were, primarily, agriculturists. They had the use of the soil bred deeply in their blood and bones. That, indeed, is why the canny French brought their Hispaniola slaves from Dahomey. Left to themselves at the old estate in the north central hills of Santa Cruz, the little community rapidly reverted to their African ways. They tilled the soil; sporadically, it is true; yet, they tilled it. They needed a weather prognosticator. There are sudden storms in summer throughout the vast sweep of the West India Islands, devastating storms, hurricanes indeed; long, wasting periods of drought. They needed a tree-man up there. They set apart Silvio Fabricius.

That fact made the young fellow what a White man would call "sacred." Not for nothing had they danced and performed their "stupid" rites those three days and nights to the detriment of Hans Grumbach's sugar-cane. No. Silvio Fabricius from the moment he had clasped his arms about the growing coconut palm was as much a person "set apart," dedicated, as any White man's pundit, priest, or yogi. Hence the various *tabus* which, like the case of the green coconuts, had puzzled Hans Grumbach. He must never take his attention away from the tree. There, beside it, he was consecrated to live and to die. When he departed from his "brother the tree," it was only for the purpose of reporting something which the tribe should know; something, that is, which his brother the tree had told him! There would be drenching rain the second day following. A plague of small green flies would, the third day later, come to annoy the animals. The banana grove must be propped forthwith; otherwise, a high wind, two days hence, would nullify all the work of its planting and care.

Such were the messages that Silvio Fabricius, austere, introspective, unnoticing, his mind fully preoccupied with his brotherhood to the tree, brought to his tribe; proceeded, the message delivered, austerely back to his station beside the magnificent palm.

All this, because of my status as the great-nephew of an old Bukra (White Lord) whom he remembered with love and reverence, and because he discovered that I knew about tree-men and many other matters usually sealed books to Bukras, the old fellow who was the village patriarch, who, by right of his se-

niority, received and passed on from Silvio the messages from Silvio's brother the tree, amply substantiated. There was nothing secretive about him, once he knew my interest in these things. Such procedure as the securing of a tree-man for his tribe seemed to the old man entirely logical; there was no necessary secret about it, certainly not from sympathetic me, the "yoong marster" of Great Fountain Estate.

And Hans Grumbach, once he had finished with his road-work, not being aware of all this, but sensing something out of the ordinary and hence to be feared about Silvio Fabricius and his palm tree, decided to end the stupidness out there. *Grumbach decided to cut down the tree.*

If I had had any inkling of this intention I could have saved Grumbach. It would have been a comparatively simple matter for me to have said enough to Carrington to have him forbid it; or, indeed, as a partner in the control of the estate, to forbid it myself. But I knew nothing about it, and have in my statement of his intention to destroy the tree supplied my own conception of his motives.

GRUMBACH, although virtually Caucasian in appearance, was of mixed blood, and quite without the Caucasian background of superior quality which makes the educated West Indian *mestizo* the splendid citizen he is. Grumbach was quite devoid of the Caucasian aristocrat's tolerance for the preoccupations of the Blacks. To him such affairs were "stupidness," merely. Like others of his kind he held the Black People in a kind of contempt; was wholly, I imagine, without sympathy for them, though a worthy fellow enough in his limited way. And, perhaps, he had not enough Negro in him to understand instinctively even so much as what Silvio Fabricius, the tree-man, stood for in his community.

He chose, cannily, one of the periods when Fabricius was away from his tree, reporting to the village. It was early in the afternoon, and Grumbach, having finished his road-work several days before, was directing a group of laborers who were grubbing ancient "bush"—heavy undergrowth, brush, rank weeds, small trees—from along the winding road which led from the village to the fountain or waterfall, now feeding, for the drought was no longer plaguing the island, a tumbling stream which Carrington intended to dam, lower down, for a central reserve reservoir.

The majority, if not all, of these laborers under his eye at the moment were new to the village, members of the increasing group which were coming into the restored stone cabins as fast as these became habitable. They were cutting out the brush with machetes, canebills, and knives, and, for the small trees, a couple of axes were being used from time to time. This work was being done quite near the tree, and from his position in the roadway overlooking his gang, Grumbach must have seen the tree-man leave his station and start toward the village with one of his "messages."

This opportunity—he had, unquestionably, made up his mind about it all—was too good to be lost. As I learned from the two men whom he detached from his grubbing-gang and took with him, Silvio Fabricius was hardly out of sight over the sweep of the lower portion of the great field near the upper edge of which the coconut palm towered, when Grumbach called the two axmen to follow him, and, with a word to the rest of the gang, led the way across the field's edge to the tree.

About this time Carrington and I were returning from one of our inspections of

the fountain. We had been up there several times of late, since the scheme for the dam had been working in our minds. We were returning toward the village and the construction work progressing there along that same pathway through the big field from which, years before, I had had my first sight of the tree-man.

As we came in sight of the tree, toward which I invariably looked when I was near it, I saw, of course, that Fabricius was not there. Grumbach and his two laborers stood under it, Grumbach talking to the men. One of them as we approached—we were still perhaps a hundred yards distant—shook his head emphatically. He told me later that Grumbach had led them straight to the tree and commanded them to chop it down directly, one working on either side, opposite each other, the ax-strokes to alternate with each other. Detailed instructions such as these are invariably given to such laborers in the West Indies.

Both men had demurred. They were not of the village, it is true, not, certainly, Dahomeyans. But—they had some idea, even after generations away from "Guinea," that here was something strange: something over which the suitable course was to "go stupid." Both men, therefore, "went stupid" forthwith.

Grumbach, as was usual with him, poor fellow, was vastly annoyed by this process. I could hear him barge out at the laborers, see him gesticulate. Then from the nearest, he seized the ax and attacked the tree himself. He struck a savage blow at it; then, gathering himself together, for he was stout like the middle-aged of all his class, and unused to such work, he struck again, somewhat above the place where the first ax-blow had landed on the tree.

"You'd better stop him, Carrington," said I, "and I will explain my reasons to you afterward."

Carrington cupped his hands and shouted, and both Negroes looked toward us. But Grumbach, apparently, had not heard, or, if he had, supposed that the words were directed to somebody other than himself. Thus, everybody within view was occupied, you will note—Carrington looking at Grumbach; the two laborers looking toward us; Grumbach intent upon making an impression on the tough coconut wood. I alone, for some instinctive reason, thought suddenly of Silvio Fabricius, and directed my gaze toward the point, down the long field, over which horizon he would appear when returning.

Perhaps it was the sound of the ax's impact against his brother the tree, apprehended by a set of senses for seventeen years attuned to the tree's moods and rustlings, to the "messages" which his brother the tree imparted to him; perhaps some uncanny instinct merely, that arrested him in his course toward the village down there, carrying the current "message" from the tree about tomorrow's weather.

As I looked, Silvio Fabricius, running lightly, erect, came over the distant "horizon" of the lower field's bosomed slope. He stopped there, a distant figure, but clearly within my view. Without taking my eyes off him I spoke again to Carrington:

"You must stop him, Carrington—there's more in this than you know. Stop him—at once!"

And, as Carrington shouted a second time, Grumbach raised the ax for the third blow at the tree, the blow which did not land.

As the ax came up, Silvio Fabricius reached for the small, sharp canebill which hung beside him from his trouser-belt, a cutting tool with which he smoothed the bark of his brother the tree on occasion; cut out annually the choking

mass of "cloth" from its top; removed fading fronds as soon as their decay reached the stage where they were no longer benefiting the tree; cut his coconuts. I could see the hot sunlight flash against the wide blade of the canebill as though it had been a small heliograph-mirror. Fabricius was about a thousand yards away. He raised the canebill in the air and with it made a sudden, cutting, pulling motion downward.

Fascinated, I watched him return the canebill to its place, on its hook, fastened to the belt at the left side.

But, abruptly, my attention was distracted to what was going on nearer at hand. Carrington's shout died, half uttered. Simultaneously I heard the yells of uncontrollable, sudden terror from the two laborers at the tree's foot. My eyes, snatched away from the distant tree-man, turned to Carrington beside me, glimpsing a look of terrified apprehension; then, with the speed of thought, toward the tree where one laborer was in the act of falling face-downward on the ground—I caught the terrified white gleam of his rolled eyes—the other, twisting himself away from the tree toward us, the very epitome of crude horror, his hands over his eyes. And my glance was turned just in time to see the great coconut which, detached from its heavy fibrous cordage up there, sixty feet above the ground, struck Grumbach full and true on the wide pith helmet which he affected, planter-wise, against the sun.

He seemed almost to be driven into the ground by the impact; the ax flew off at an angle, past the tree.

He never moved. And when, with the help of the two laborers, Carrington and I, having summoned a cart from the near-by road-gang cutting bushes, lifted the body, the head which had been that poor devil Grumbach's, was merely a mass of sodden pulp.

We took the body down the road in the cart, toward his newly erected manager's house. And a few yards along our way Silvio Fabricius passed us, running erectly, his somber face expressionless, his stride a kind of dignified lope, glancing not to right or left, speeding straight to his brother the tree which had been injured in his absence.

Looking back, where the road took a turn, I saw him, leaning now close beside the tree, his long fingers probing the two gashes which Hans Grumbach, who would never swing another ax, had made there, about two feet above the ground; while aloft the glorious fronds of the massive tree burgeoned like great sails in the afternoon trade wind.

Later that afternoon we sent the mortal remains of Hans Grumbach down the long hill road to Frederiksted in a cart, decently disposed, after telephoning his wife's relatives to break the sorrowful news to her. It was Carrington who telephoned, at my suggestion. I told him that they would appreciate it, he being the head of the company. Such *nuances* have their meaning in the West Indies, where the finer shades are of an importance. He explained that it was an accident, gave the particulars as he had seen them with his own eyes—Grumbach had been working under a tall coconut palm and a heavy coconut, falling, had struck him and killed him instantly. It had been a quite merciful death. . . .

THE next morning—we were at that time sleeping at Great Fountain as we oversaw in person the carrying out of the basic works there—I walked up toward the fountain again, alone, after a sleepless night of cogitation. I walked across the section of field between the newly grubbed roadside and the great tree. I walked straight up to the tree-

man, stood beside him. He paid no attention to me whatever. I spoke to him.

"Fabricius," said I, "it is necessary that I should speak to you."

The tree-man turned his gaze upon me gravely. Seen thus, face to face, he was a remarkably handsome person, now about thirty years of age, his features regular, his expression calm, inscrutable; wise with a wisdom certainly not Caucasian, such as to put into my mind the phrase: "not of this world." He bowed, gravely, as though assuring me of his attention.

I said: "I was looking at you yesterday afternoon when you came back to yon tree, over the lower end of the field—down there." I indicated where he had stood with a gesture. Again he bowed, without any change of expression.

"I wish to have you know," I continued, "that I understand; that no one else besides me saw you, saw what you did—with the canebill, I mean. I wish you to know that what I saw I am keeping to myself. That is all."

Silvio Fabricius the tree-man continued to look into my face, without any visible change whatever in his expression. For the third time he nodded, presumably to indicate that he understood what I had said, but utterly without any emotion whatever. Then, in a deep, resonant voice, he spoke to me; the first, and last, time I have ever heard him utter a word.

"Yo' loike to know, yoong marster," said he, with an impressive gravity, "me brudda"—he placed a hand against the tree's smooth trunk—"t'ink hoighly 'bout yo', sar. Ahlso 'bout de enterprise fo' pineopples. Him please', sar, yoong marster; him indicate-me yo' course be serene an' ahlso of a profit." The tree-man bowed again, and without another word or so much as a glance in my direction, detaching his attention from me as deliberately as he had given it when I first spoke to him, he turned toward his brother the tree, laid his face against the trunk, and slowly encircled the massive trunk with his two great muscular black arms. . . .

I arrived on the island the middle of October, 1928, coming down as usual from New York after my summer in the States. Our property at Great Fountain had suffered severely in the hurricane of the previous month, and when I arrived there I found Carrington well along with the processes of restoration. Many precautions had been taken beforehand and our property had suffered because of these much less than the other estates. I had told Carrington, who had a certain respect for my familiarity with "native manners and customs," enough about the tree-man and his functions tribally to cause him to heed the warning, transmitted by the now nearly helpless old patriarch of the village, and brought in by the tree-man four days before the hurricane broke—and two days before the government cable-advice had reached the island.

Silvio Fabricius had stayed beside his tree. On the third day, when it was possible for the villagers to get as far as the upper end of the great field near the fountain, he had been found, Carrington reported to me, lying in the field, dead, his face composed inscrutably, the great trunk of his brother the tree across his chest, which had been crushed by its great weight, when, uprooted by the wind, it had fallen.

And until they wore off there had been smears of earth, Carrington said, on the heads and faces of all the original Dahomeyan villagers and upon the heads and faces of several of the newer laborer families as well.

"Cackling laughter broke out in the black woods of the slopes that hemmed us in."

THE HORROR FROM THE HILLS

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

Chaugnar Faugn goes ravening out into the world in search of victims

The Story Thus Far

CLARK ULMAN brings from Asia to the Manhattan Museum in New York a stone elephant-god, Chaugnar Faugn, and tells a wild story about how the god had fed on his blood on the voyage. He dies of weakness, and the next day a guard in the Museum is found dead in front of the elephant-god, which is covered with his blood. Algernon Harris, curator of archeology for the Museum, notices that the trunk of the stone god has shifted its position!

3. An Archeological Digression

"THE figure is totally unfamiliar," said Doctor Imbert. "Nothing even remotely resembling it occurs in Asian or African mythology."

He scowled and returned the photograph to his youthful visitor, who deposited it on the arm of his chair.

"I confess," he continued, "that it puzzles and disturbs me. It's preposterously archeological, if you get what I mean. It isn't the sort of thing that one would—imagine."

Young Harris nodded. "I could never have imagined it. I visualize unmentionable things constantly—I'm a sensational-

ist-introvert of extreme type—but I could never have imagined anything so—so——"

"*Racial,*" put in Doctor Imbert. "I believe that is the word you were groping for. That *thing* is a symbolic embodiment of the massed imaginative heritage of an entire people. It's a composite—like the Homeric epics or the Sphinx of Giza. It's the kind of art manifestation you would expect a primitive people to produce collectively. It's so contradictory in conception and so inexplicably foul that one can scarcely conceive of a mere individual anywhere in the world deliberately sitting down and creating it out of his own imagination. I will concede that an unusually gifted artist might be *capable* of imagining it, but I doubt if such an obscenity would ever form in the human brain without a *raison d'etre.* And no individual living in a civilized state would experience the need, the desire to imagine such a thing, and least of all, to give it objective expression.

"Insanity, of course, might account for it, but the so-called interpretative reveries of madmen are nearly always of predictable nature. Grotesque and absurd as they may sometimes be, certain images occur in them again and again and these images are definitely meaningful. They follow prescribed patterns, are crude and distorted representations of familiar objects and people. The morbidities out of which they arise have been studied and classified and an alienist who knows his business can usually decipher them. If you have ever examined a batch of drawings from a lunatic asylum you will have noticed how the same motifs occur repeatedly and how utterly *unimaginative* such things are from a sane and sophisticated point of view.

"It is of course true that the folk creations of primitive peoples usually embody or symbolize definite human preoccupations, but more boldly and imaginatively, and occasionally they depart from the predictable to such an extent that even our expert is obliged to throw up his hands.

"I have always believed that most of the major and minor monstrosities that figure so conspicuously in the pantheons of barbarian races—feathered serpents, animal-headed priests, grimacing sphinxes, etc., are synthetic conceptions. Let us suppose, for instance, that a tribe of reasonably enlightened barbarians is animated by the unique social impulse of co-operative agriculture and is moved to embody its ideals in some colossal fetish designed to suggest both fertility and brotherhood—in, let us say, a great stone Magna Mater with arms outstretched to embrace all classes and conditions of men. Then let us suppose that co-operative agriculture falls into disrepute and the tribe becomes obsessed by dreams of martial conquest. What happens? To an obbligato of tom-toms and war drums the Mother Goddess is transfigured. A spear is placed between her extended arms, the expression of her face altered from benignity to ferocity, great gashes chiseled in her cheeks, red paint smeared on her arms, breasts and shoulders and her ears lopped off. Let another generation pass and the demoniac goddess of war will be transformed into something else—perhaps into a symbol of the foulest debauchery.

"In a hundred years the original fetish will have become a monstrous caricature, a record in stone of the thoughts and emotions of generations of men.

"It is the business of the ethnologist and the archeologist to decipher such records, and if our scientist is sufficiently learned and diligent he can, as you know, supply a reason for every peculiarity of configuration. Competent scholars have traced, in a rough way, the advance or retrogression of

racial groups in ethical and esthetic directions merely by studying and comparing their objects of worship and there does not exist a more fruitful science than idolography.

"But occasionally our ethnologist encounters a nut that he can not crack, a god or goddess so diabolical or grotesque or loathsome in conformation that it is impossible to link it associatively with even the most revolting of tribal retrogressions. It is a notorious fact that human races are less apt to advance than circle back on the course of evolution, and that idols and fetishes that were originally conceived in a comparatively noble spirit very often become, in the course of time, embodiments of the bestial and the unclean. The degraded objects of worship now employed by African bushmen and Australian aborigines may conceivably have been considerably less revolting ten or fifteen thousand years ago. It is impossible to predict the depths to which a race may descend and the appalling transformation which may occur in its sacred imagery.

"And so occasionally we encounter shapes that we scarcely like to speculate about, shapes so *complicatedly* vile that they haven't even analogous counterparts in comparative mythology. Your fetish is of that nature. It is, as I say, preposterously archeological and it differs unmistakably—although I am willing to concede a superficial resemblance—from the distorted caricatures conjured up by futurists and lunatics. Only racial dissolution and decay extending over wide wastes of years could, in my opinion, account for such a ghastly anomaly."

He leaned forward and tapped Algernon significantly upon the knee. "You haven't told me its history," he admonished. "Reticence is an archeologist's prerogative, and in our work it is always an asset, but for a young man you're almost abnormally addicted to it."

Algernon blushed to the roots of his hair. "I'm seldom actually reticent," he said. "At the Museum they all think I talk too much. I've an exuberant, officious way at times that positively appalls Mr. Scollard. But this affair is so—so outside all normal experience that I've been dreading to tax your credulity with a résumé of it."

Doctor Imbert smiled. "Your books reveal that you are a very cautious and honest scholar," he said. "I don't believe I'd be inclined to question the veracity of whatever you may choose to tell me."

"Very well," said Algernon. "I'll cut loose then. But I must entreat that you suspend judgment till you've heard all of the evidence. One can adduce rational explanations for each of the incidents I shall describe, but when one views them in the sequence in which they occurred they resolve themselves into a devastatingly hideous enigma."

Very tersely, without self-consciousness or affectation, Algernon then related all that he knew and all that he surmised and suspected about the thing whose image spread defilement on the paper before him.

Doctor Imbert heard him out in silence. But his eyes, as he listened, grew bright with horror and his chin evinced an agitation impossible to describe.

"I doubt if I can help you," he said, when Algernon was done. "This thing transcends all of my experience."

There ensued a silence. Then Algernon sputtered hysterically. "But what *are* we to do? Surely you've something to suggest!"

Doctor Imbert rose shakingly to his feet. "I have—yes. I know some one who can, perhaps, help. He's a recluse, a psychic—a magnificent intellect obsessed by mysteries and mysticisms. I put little faith in

such things—to me it's a degradation. But I'll take you to him. I'll take you anyway. God knows you're in trouble—that is obvious to me. And this man may be able to suggest something. Roger Little is his name. No doubt you've heard of him. He used to be a criminal investigator. A good one—a pschologist—discerning, erudite, shrewd—no mere detective-novel sleuth."

Algernon nodded understandingly. "Let us go to him at once," he said.

4. *The Horror on the Hills*

It was while Algernon and Doctor Imbert were journeying in the subway toward Roger Little's residence in the Borough of Queens that the Horror was announced to the world. An account of its initial manifestation had been flashed from Spain at midday to a great American news syndicate and all of the New York papers had something about it in their evening editions. The *News-Graphic's* account was perhaps the most ominously disturbing in its implications. A copywriter on that enterprising sheet had surmised that the atrocities were distinguished by something outré, something altogether inexplicable, and by choosing his diction with unusual care he had succeeded in conveying to his unappreciative readers a tingling intimation of shockingness, of terror.

Beneath half-inch headlines which read:

HIDEOUS MASSACRE IN THE PYRENEES

he had written:

"The authorities are completely baffled. Who would wish to assassinate fourteen simple peasants? They were found at sundown on the mountain's crest. All in a row they lay, very still, very pale—very silent and pale beneath the soft Spanish sky. All about them stretched new-fallen snow and beside them on the white expanse were marks, peculiar and baffling. Men do not make footprints a yard wide. And why were all the victims laid so evenly in a row? What violence was it that could deprive them of their heads, drain the blood from their bodies and lay them stark and naked in a row upon the white snow?"

5. *Little's Dream*

"Some one has been murdered and so you wish my advice," murmured Roger Little wearily. "You wish the advice of an old eccentric idiot who has ceased to traffic with crime." He was staring into the fire and the lurid radiance which streamed roomward from the grate so illumed the sharp outlines of his profile that Algernon was struck silent with awe.

"A positively Satanic presence," he murmured, to himself. "The exact facsimile of a sorcerer from the *Malleus Maleficarum*. They would have burned him in the Fifteenth Century."

"Murder," resumed Little, "has become a shabbily synthetic art and even the most daring masterpieces of the contemporary school are composed of inferior ingredients clumsily combined. Men no longer live in fear of the unknown, and that utter and absymal disintegration of soul which the wise still call psychic evil no longer motivates our major atrocities. Anger, jealousy, and a paltry desire for material gain are pitiful emotional substitutes for the perverse and lonely egoism which inspired the great crimes of the Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. When men killed with the deliberate certainty that they were jeopardizing their immortal souls and when the human body was regarded as a tabernacle for something more—or less—than human the crime of murder assumed epic and unholy proportions. The mere discovery of a mutilated cadaver in an age when men still believed in something—at least in something—filled every one with terror and with awe. Men, women and children took refuge behind barricaded doors and the more devout fell upon their knees, crossed themselves, lighted candles and chanted innumerable exorcisms.

"But in this decadent age when a human being is assassinated society merely

shrugs its shoulders and relinquishes the sequel to the police. What have the police to do with a sacrament of evil in our midst? The sense of virtually immitigable evil, of stark unreasoning fear which murder once left in its wake, and the intense esthetic enjoyment which certain individuals derived from merely studying such crimes as works of perverse and diabolical art have no parallels in contemporary experience. Hence it is that all modern murderers commit commonplace crimes—kill prosaically and almost indifferently without any suspicion that they are destroying more than the lives of their unfortunate victims. And people go calmly about their business and are apparently not displeased to rub shoulders with the unholy ones in theaters, restaurants and subways!"

Algernon shifted excitedly in his chair. "But the problem we bring to you is enmeshed in the supernatural more hideously than any atrocity of the Ages of Faith. It transcends normal experience. If you will listen while I——"

But Little shook his head. "I have plumbed to satiety the cosmic abysses," he affirmed. "I have written books—many books—adducing dozens of instances of possession, of return, of immolation, of divination, and of transformation. I have confirmed the reality of the *concubitus daemonum;* have proved incontestably the existence of vampires, succubi and lamias, and in this very room I have slipt, not too unwillingly, into the warm and clinging arms of women five centuries dead."

He shuddered. "But all infamies and decadencies on the crustal earth are eclipsed by the befouling and venomous nastiness that lurks bodilessly in undimensioned space. In my dreams I have heard the nauseous piping of its glutinous flutes and I have glimpsed terribly for an instant the nets and trawls with which it angles for men."

Algernon's eyes were points of fire. "That horror is like——" he began, but Little would not let him finish.

"My books gangrene on grime-black shelves," he muttered. "No one will read them because they treat of—facts. I am everywhere sneered at as an eccentric—a madman. Erudite and brilliant, but as mad as Bruno when he provided a roast for the Fathers."

He rose passionately to his feet. "So I've definitely renounced the collection and correlation of facts," he said. "Hereafter I shall embody my unique convictions in the eloquent and persuasive guise of a fable. I shall write a novel. The art of fiction as a purveyor of essential truth has innumerable advantages which detached and impersonal utterance must of necessity lack. The fictioneer can familiarize his readers *gradually* with new and startling doctrines and avoid shocking them into a precipitous retreat into the shell of old and conventional beliefs; can prevent them from taking refuge in tradition before their minds have grasped one-quarter of the novelties he is intent upon promulgating. Then, too, the artist can be so much more persuasive and eloquent than the scientist, and it can never be sufficiently emphasized that eloquence is never so effective in convincing men that certain things which are obviously false are momentarily true as it is in inducing them to discover that which is ultimately true beneath all the distortions of reality which have been accepted by the race in response to an urge for mere wish-fulfilment. Human wishes and desires are so eloquent in themselves that certainly some eloquence must be used in combating them. And that is why the mere scientist is so hopelessly at a loss when he seeks to convert others to what he himself believes to be the truth. He doesn't perceive that new truths must be presented to the human mind vividly, uniquely, as though one were initiating a mystery or instituting a

sacrament, and that every failure to so present them decreases the likelihood that they will gain proponents, and that an entire civilization may pass away before any one arises with sufficient imagination and sufficient eloquence to take truths which have been enunciated once or twice coldly and forgotten because of the repugnance with which the common man regards facts barely recited and to clothe them in garments of terror and splendor and awe and so link them with far stars and the wind that moves above the waters and the mystery and strangeness that will be in all things till the end of time."

Little's looks were ecstatic, his eyes tapers of fire. "At this moment," he exclaimed, "I am enmeshing in art's Delphic profundity the most sublime of my dreams —I am fabricating a garment, golden-webbed, swimming in the dew of star-land, wet with the strangeness of constellations afar to veil with enchantment the milieu cosmic, to enshroud in glamor the hideous appalling nakedness of that which is without form and void, of blackness shrieking to the pit it has itself created, of sticky chaos ravening in the undimensioned."

He stopped suddenly and stared at Algernon and Imbert with inturned, unseeing eyes. Then, slowly, that which had been afar returned with blood-rush to the entranced brain, and his lips spoke, proffering apology. "I have raved, no doubt. Like Blake, like Rowlandson, like Gerard De Nerval I am always dreaming dreams, seeing visions. And to worldly men, calm and objective toward earth-things, skeptical of all else, such visions, such glimpses, astonish, appall—or are wholly incomprehensible. And you, no doubt, are inwardly smiling, waggishly smiling, branding me 'touched.' But if you knew a little, only a little more of cosmic lore you might—sympathize a little.

"For there are things from *outside* watching always, secretly watching our little capers, our grotesque pranks. Men have disappeared. You're aware of that, aren't you? Men have disappeared from the dear, familiar earth—at high noon, in the sunlight. Malignant and unknowable entities, *fishers* from outside have let down invisible tentacles, nets, trawls, and they have been caught up, have vanished into a vacuum. And others have gone mad, witnessing such things.

"When a man ascends a flight of stairs it does not inevitably follow that he will arrive at the top. When a man crosses a street or a field or a public square it is not foreordained that he will reach the other side. *I have seen strange shadows in the sky.* Other worlds impinging on ours? I know that there are other worlds, but perhaps they do not *dimensionally* impinge. Perhaps from fourth, fifth, six-dimensional worlds things with forms invisible to us, with faces veiled to us, reach down and take—instantaneously, mercilessly. Feeding on us perhaps? Using our brains for fodder? A few have glimpsed the truth awfully for an instant in dreams, visions. But only minds psychically attuned to the rhythms of curved and angled space can journey in subconscious mentation toward the bodiless shapes that flicker appallingly in the void a thousand billion light years beyond the remotest of the spiral nebulæ.

"Yet I—can do this. And you," he laughed, "come to me with a little mundane murder."

For an instant there was silence in the room. Then Algernon rose and voiced fierce protest. "You say," he exclaimed, "a little mundane murder, but I—a thing more hideous, more alien and revolting to sanity and the world we know than all your cosmic trawlers, than all your 'intrusions' from beyond."

Little shook his head. "No," he said. "No. You have harkened to some nursery tale, have given heed to the child's

burden of wo. I mean, the surmises, fears, dreads, forebodings of ordinary men. Imaginative in a worldly sense, but blinder and dumber than clods cosmically. I could unravel your puzzle with the most superficial layer of my waking mind, the little conscious mind that is so weak, so futile to grapple with anything more disturbing than what the body shall eat and drink and wear."

"And had I not seen," said Algernon, speaking very deliberately, "a stone thing shift its bulk, doing what the inanimate has never done in all the ages man has looked rationally upon it, I should have shunned you for a madman!"

"A stone, you say, moved?" For the first time Little's interest quickened questward.

"Yes, in the shape in which something —nature primeval perhaps, in eons primeval—shaped it. Moved in the night, unwatched by me. When Chaugnar Faugn——"

He stopped, was silent. For from his chair Little had sprung with a cry, his face bloodless, his knees wobbling, a cry of terror issuing from his thin lips.

"What is the matter?" gasped Doctor Imbert, and Algernon choked, not knowing what to make of so strange an occurrence. For Little seemed completely undone, a mystic gone energetically mad, hysterically epileptic, with brain partitions awry and mind a jumbled ferment of fantasy and horror. But at last he sank again into the chair from which he had so shockingly arisen, and a trace of color returned to his cheeks.

"Forgive me," he murmured brokenly, "for my skepticisms and for this exhibition of—of cowardice. I'm compelled to use that word. Honesty demands it. When you mentioned Chaugnar Faugn I was for an instant mortally terrified."

He drew a deep breath. "The dream was so vivid that my mind rejected instantly a symbolic or allegorical interpretation. That name especially—Chaugnar Faugn. I was certain that something, somewhere, bore it; that the ghastliness that took Publius Libo on the high hills was an actuality, but not, I had hoped, an actuality for us. Something long past, I prayed, something long past and forgotten. A horror of the ancient world that would never return, never intrude itself into our prosaic little lives." He broke off, seemingly lost in thought.

"Tell me about it," he entreated, after a moment.

With bloodless lips Algernon related once again the history of Chaugnar Faugn as he had gleaned it from Ulman's revolting narrative, enhancing a little its hideousness by half-guesses and surmises of his own. Little listened quiescent, his face a mask, only the throbbing of the veins on his temples betraying the agitation which racked him. As Algernon concluded, the clock on the mantel, a tall, negro-colored clock with wings on its shoulders and a great yellow ocean spider painted on its opalescent face, struck the hour: eleven even strokes pealed from it, raping the stillness that had settled for an instant on the room. Algernon shivered, apprehensive at the lateness of the hour, fearful that in his absence Chaugnar Faugn might move again.

But now Little was speaking, striving painfully to keep his voice from sinking to a whisper.

"I had the dream last Halloween," he began, "and for detail, color and somber, brooding menace it surpasses anything of the kind I have experienced in recent years. It took form slowly, beginning as a nervous move from the atrium of my house into a scroll-lined library to escape the sound of a fountain, and continuing as an earnest and friendly argument with a stout, firm-lipped man of about thirty-

five, with strong, pure Roman features and the rather cumbersome equipment of a *legatus* in active military service. Impressions of identity and locale were so nebulous and gradual in their unfoldment as to be difficult to trace to a source, but they seem in retrospect to have been present from the first.

"The place was not Rome, nor even Italy, but the small provincial municipium of Calagurris on the south bank of the Iberus in Hispania Citerior. It was in the Republican age, because the province was still under a senatorial proconsul instead of a *legatus* of the Imperator. I was a man of about my own waking age and build. I was clad in a civilian toga of yellowish color with the two thin reddish stripes of the equestrian order. My name was L. Cælius Rufus and my rank seemed to be that of a provincial quaestor. I was definitely an Italian-born Roman, the province of Calagurris being alien, colonial soil to me. My guest was Cnæus Balbutius, *legatus* of the XII Legion, which was permanently encamped just outside the town on the river-bank. The home in which I was receiving him was a suburban villa on a hillside south of the compact section, and it overlooked both town and river.

"The day before I had received a worried call from one Tib. Annæus Mela, edile of the small town of Pompelo, three days' march to the north in the territory of the Vascones at the foot of the mysterious Pyrenees. He had been to request Balbutius to spare him a cohort for a very extraordinary service on the night of the Kalends of November and Balbutius had emphatically refused. Therefore, knowing me to be acquainted with P. Scribonius Libo, the proconsul at Tarraco, he had come to ask me to lay his case by letter before that official. Mela was a dark, lean man of middle age, of presentable Roman features but with the coarse hair of a Celtiberian.

"It seems that there dwelt hidden in the Pyrenees a strange race of small dark people unlike the Gauls and Celtiberians in speech and features, who indulged in terrible rites and practises twice every year, on the Kalends of Maius and November. They lit fires on the hilltops at dusk, beat continuously on strange drums and howled horribly all through the night. Always before these orgies people would be found missing from the village and none of them were ever known to return. It was thought that they were stolen for sacrificial purposes, but no one dared to investigate, and eventually the semi-annual loss of villagers came to be regarded as a regular tribute, like the seven youths and maidens that Athens was forced to send each year to Crete for King Minos and the Minotaur.

"The tribal Vascones and even some of the semi-Romanized cottagers of the foothills were suspected by the inhabitants of Pompelo of being in league with the strange dark folk—*Miri Nigri* was the name used in my dream. These dark folk were seen in Pompelo only once a year—in summer, when a few of their number would come down from the hills to trade with the merchants. They seemed incapable of speech and transacted business by signs.

"During the preceding summer the small folk had come to trade as usual—five of them—but had become involved in a general scuffle when one of them had attempted to torture a dog for pleasure in the forum. In this fighting two of them had been killed and the remaining three had returned to the hills with evil faces. Now it was autumn and *the customary quota of villagers had not disappeared.* It was not normal for the Miri nigri thus to spare Pompelo. Clearly they must have reserved the town for some terrible doom,

which they would call down on their unholy Sabbath-night as they drummed and howled and danced outrageously on the mountain's crest. Fear walked through Pompelo and the edile Mela had come to Calagurris to ask for a cohort to invade the hills on the sabbath night and break up the obscene rites before the ceremony might be brought to a head. But Balbutius had laughed at him and refused. He thought it poor policy for the Roman administration to meddle in local quarrels. So Mela had been obliged to come to me. I enheartened him as best I could, and promised help, and he returned to Pompelo at least partly reassured.

"Before writing the proconsul I had thought it best to argue with Balbutius himself, so I had been to see him at the camp, found him out and left word with a centurion that I would welcome a call from him. Now he was here and had reiterated his belief that we ought not to complicate our administration by arousing the resentment of the tribesmen, as we undoubtedly would if we attempted to suppress a rite with which they were obviously in ill-concealed sympathy.

"I seemed to have read considerable about the dark rites of certain unknown and wholly barbaric races, for I recall feeling a sense of monstrous impending doom and trying my best to induce Balbutius to put down the sabbath. To his objections I replied that it had never been the custom of the Roman people to be swayed by the whims of barbarians when the fortunes of Roman citizens were in danger and that he ought not to forget the status of Pompelo as a legal colony, small as it was. That the good-will of the tribal Vascones was little to be depended upon at best, and that the trust and friendship of the Romanized townsfolk, in whom was more than a little of our own blood after three generations of colonization, was a matter of far greater importance to the smooth working of that provincial government on which the security of the Roman imperium primarily rested. Furthermore, that I had reason to believe, from my studies, that the apprehensions of the Pompelonians were disturbingly well-founded, and that there was indeed brewing in the high hills a monstrous doom which it would ill become the traditions of Rome to countenance. That I would be surprized to encounter laxity in the representatives of those whose ancestors had not hesitated to put to death large numbers of Roman citizens for participation in the orgies of Bacchus and had ordered engraved on public tablets of bronze the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*.

"But I could not influence Balbutius. He went away courteously but unmoved. So I at once took a reed pen and wrote a letter to the proconsul Libo, sealing it and calling for a wiry young slave—a Greek called Antipater—to take it to Tarraco.

"The following morning I went out on foot, down the hill to the town and through the narrow block-paved streets with high whitewashed dead-walls and gaudily painted shops with awnings. The crowds vere very vivid. Legionaries of all races, Roman colonists, tribal Celtiberi, Romanized natives, Romanized and Iberized Carthaginians, mongrels of all sorts. I spoke to only one person, a Roman named Æbutius, about whom I recall nothing. I visited the camp—a great area with an earthen wall ten feet high and streets of wooden huts inside, and I called at the *praetorium* to tell Balbutius that I had written the proconsul. He was still pleasant but unmoved. Later I went home, read in the garden, bathed, dined, talked with the family and went to bed—having, a little later, a nightmare *within the dream*. which centered about a dark terrible desert with cyclopean ruins of stone and a malign presence over all.

"About noon the next day—I had been

reading in the garden—the Greek returned with a letter and enclosure from Libo. I broke the seal and read: 'P. SCRIBONIVS. L. CAELIO. S. D. SI. TV. VALES. VALEO. QVAE. SCRIPSISTI. AVDIVI. NEC. ALIAS. PVTO.'

"In a word, the proconsul agreed with me—had known about the Miri Nigri himself—and enclosed an order for the advance of the cohort to Pompelo at once, by forced marches, in order to reach the doom-shadowed town on the day before the fatal Kalends. He requested me to accompany it because of my knowledge of what the mysterious rites were whispered to be, and furthermore declared his design of going along himself, saying that he was even then on the point of setting out and would be in Pompelo before we could be.

"I LOST not a second in going personally to the camp and handing the orders to Balbutius, and I must say he took his defeat gracefully. He decided to send Cohors V, under Sextus Asellius, and presently summoned that *legatus*—a slim, supercilious youth with frizzed hair and a fashionable fringe of beard-growth on his under jaw. Asellius was openly hostile to the move but dared not disregard orders. Balbutius said he would have the cohort at the bridge across the Iberus in an hour and I rushed home to prepare for the rough day and night march.

"I put on a heavy pænula and ordered a litter with six Illyrian bearers, and reached the bridge ahead of the cohort. At last, though, I saw the silver eagles flashing along the street to my left, and Balbutius—who had decided at the last moment to go along himself—rode out ahead and accompanied my litter ahead of the troops as we crossed the bridge and struck out over the plains toward the mystic line of dimly glimpsed violet hills. There was no long sleep during all the march, but we had naps and brief halts and bites of lunch—cakes and cheese. Balbutius usually rode by my litter in conversation (it was infantry, but he and Asellius were mounted) but sometimes I read —M. Porcius Cato *De Re Rustica,* and a hideous manuscript in Greek, which made me shudder even to touch or look at but of which I can not remember a single word.

"The second morning we reached the whitewashed houses of Pompelo and trembled at the fear that was on the place. There was a wooden amphitheater east of the village, and a large open plain on the west. All the immediate ground was flat, but the Pyrenees rose up green and menacing on the north, looking nearer than they were. Scribonius Libo had reached there ahead of us with his secretary, Q. Trebellius Pollio, and he and the edile Mela greeted us in the forum. We all—Libo, Pollio, Mela, Balbutius, Asellius and I—went into the curia (an excellent new building with a Corinthian portico) and discussed ways and means, and I saw that the proconsul was with me heart and soul.

"But Balbutius and Asellius continued to argue and at times the discussion grew very tense. Libo was an utterly admirable old man, and he insisted on going into the hills with the rest of us and seeing the awful revelations of the night. Mela, ghastly with fright, promised horses to those of us who were not mounted. He had pluck—for he meant to go himself.

"It is impossible even to suggest the stark and ghastly terror which hung over this phase of the dream.

"Surely there never was such evil as that which brooded over the accursed town as the sinking sun threw long menacing shadows amidst the reddening afternoon. The legionaries fancied they heard the rustling of stealthy, unseen and ominously deliberate presences in the black encircling woods. Occasionally a torch had to be lighted momentarily in order to keep the

frightened three hundred together, but for the most part it was a dreadful scramble through the dark. A slit of northern sky was visible ahead between the terrible, cliff-like slopes that encompassed us and I marked the chair of Cassiopeia and the golden powder of the Via Lactea. Far, far ahead and above and appearing to merge imperceptibly into the heavens, the lines of remoter peaks could be discerned, each capped by a sickly point of unholy flame. And still the distant, hellish drums pounded incessantly on.

"AT LENGTH the route grew too steep for the horses and the six of us who were mounted were forced to take to our feet. We left the horses tethered to a clump of scrub oaks and stationed ten men to guard them, though heaven knows it was no night nor place for petty thieves to be abroad! And then we scrambled on—jostling, stumbling and sometimes climbing with our hands' help up places little short of perpendicular. Suddenly a sound behind us made every man pause as if hit by an arrow. It was from the horses we had left, and it did not cease. They were not neighing but *screaming*. They were screaming, mad with some terror beyond any this earth knows. No sound came up from the men we had left with them. Still they screamed on, and the soldiers around us stood trembling and whimpering and muttering fragments of a prayer to Rome's gods, and the gods of the East and the gods of the barbarians.

"Then there came a sharp scuffle and yell from the front of the column which made Asellius call quaveringly for a torch. There was a prostrate figure weltering in a growing and glistening pool of blood and we saw by the faint flare that it was the young guide Accius. He had killed himself because of the sound he had heard. He, who had been born and bred at the foot of those terrible hills and had heard dark whispers of their secrets, knew well why the horses had screamed. And because he knew, he had snatched a sword from the scabbard of the nearest soldier—the centurio P. Vibulanus—and had plunged it full-length into his own breast.

"At this point pandemonium broke loose because of something noticed by such of the men as were able to notice anything at all. *The sky had been snuffed out.* No longer did Cassiopeia and the Via Lactea glimmer betwixt the hills, but stark blackness loomed behind the continuously swelling fires on the distant peaks. And still the horses screamed and the far-off drums pounded hideously and incessantly on.

"Cackling laughter broke out in the black woods of the vertical slopes that hemmed us in and around the swollen fires of the distant peaks we saw prancing and leaping the awful and cyclopean silhouettes of things that were neither men nor beasts, but fiendish amalgams of both—things with huge flaring ears and long waving trunks that howled and gibbered and pranced in the skyless night. And a cold wind coiled purposively down from the empty abyss, winding sinuously about us till we started in fresh panic and struggled like Laocoon and his sons in the serpent's grasp.

"There were terrible sights in the light of the few shaking torches. Legionaries trampled one another to death and screamed more hoarsely than the horses far below. Of our immediate party Trebellius Pollio had long vanished, and I saw Mela go down beneath the heavy caligæ of a gigantic Aquitanian. Balbutius had gone mad and was grinning and simpering out an old Fescennine verse recalled from the Latian countryside of his boyhood. Asellius tried to cut his own throat, but the sentient wind held him powerless, so that he could do nothing but scream and scream and scream above the

cackling laughter and the screaming horses and the distant drums and the howling colossal shapes that capered about the demon-fires on the peaks.

"I myself was frozen to the helplessness of a statue and could not move or speak. Only old Publius Libo the proconsul was strong enough to face it like a Roman—Publius Scribonius Libo, who had gone through the Jugurthine and Mithridatic and social wars—Publius Libo three times prætor and three times consul of the republic, in whose atrium stood the ancestral forms of a hundred heroes. He and he alone had the voice of a man and of a general and triumphator. I can see him now in the dimming light of those horrible torches, among that fear-struck stampede of the doomed. I can hear him still as he spoke his last words, gathering up his toga with the dignity of a Roman and a consul: *'Malitia vetus—malitia vetus est—venit—tandem venit——'*

"And then the wooded encircling slopes burst forth with louder cackles and I saw that they were slowly moving. The hills—the terrible living hills—were closing up upon their prey. The Miri Nigri had called their terrible gods out of the void.

"Able to shriek at last, I awoke in a sea of cold perspiration.

"Calagurris, as you probably know, is a real and well-known town of Roman Spain, famed as the birthplace of the rhetorician Quintilianus. Upon consulting a classical dictionary I found Pompelo also to be real, and surviving today as the Pyrenean village of Pampelona."

He ceased speaking, and for a moment every one in the room was silent. Then Algernon: "The Chinaman had a strange dream too. He spoke of the horror on the mountains—of great things that came clumping down from the hills at nightfall."

Little nodded. "Mongolians are extremely psychic," he said. "Their minds are still virgin, untainted by skepticisms. Their under-consciousnesses are athrob with cosmic rhythms. Intimations, warnings, starland harbingers, prophecies from outside alight at night on the fertile soil of their minds and bear ominous fruit."

"And you think that Hsieh Ho's dream was a prophecy?" whispered Imbert.

"I do. Some monstrous *unfettering* will ensue. That which for two thousand years has lain somnolent will stir, wax bestial, strike. The 'great things' will descend from their frightful lair on the Spanish hills drawn manward through the will of Chaugnar Faugn. We are in propinquity to the primal, hidden horror that festers at the root of being, with the old, hidden loathsomeness which the Greeks and Romans veiled under the vaguely analogous form of a man-beast—*the feeder, the all.* The Greeks knew, for the horror left its lair to ravage, striding eastward in the dawn across Europe, wading waist-deep in the dark Ionian seas, looming monstrous at nightfall over Delos, and Samothrace and far-off Crete. A nimbus of star-foam engirdled its waist; suns, constellations gleamed in its eyes. But its breath brought madness, and its embrace, death. The feeder—the all."

The telephone bell at his elbow was jangling disconcertingly. Stretching forth a tremulous hand he grasped the receiver firmly and laid it against his cheek. "Hello," he whispered into the mouthpiece. "What is it? Who is speaking?"

"From the Manhattan Museum." The words smote ominously upon his ear. "Is Mr. Algernon Harris there? I phoned Doctor Imbert's house and they gave me this number."

"Yes, Harris is here." Little's voice was vibrant with apprehension. "I'll call him."

He turned the instrument over to Algernon and sank back exhaustedly in his chair. For a moment the latter conversed in a low tone; then an expression of utter

terror appeared on his face and a wild, distraught cry burst from his ashen lips.

He put back the receiver and tottered toward the fireplace. For an instant he stood staring intensely into the coals, his shoulders trembling and twitching in the most sickening fashion, his hands gripping the mantel's edge so tightly that his knuckles showed blue. Then he whirled and spoke in a voice pitched to such an extremity of horror that Little wished, desperately, that he might stop his ears.

"Chaugnar Faugn has disappeared," he cried. "Chaugnar Faugn has left the museum. No one saw him go and the idiot who phoned thinks that a thief removed him. Or possibly one of the attendants. But *we* know how unlikely, how inconceivable are such surmises." Hysterically he paced the room. "I am to blame," he muttered. "I should have insisted they patrol the alcove. I should have put them definitely on guard. I should have explained to them that some one might try to steal Chaugnar Faugn. They would have laughed at the truth, but I could have convinced them that the god was at least—evidence."

He smote his forehead. "But what am I saying? A watchman would have been utterly impotent to cope with such a horror. Chaugnar Faugn would have effaced him hideously in an instant. And now it is loose in the streets!"

He walked to the window and stared across the glittering harbor at the Gargantuan bulk of lower Manhattan. "It is loose over there," he cried, raising his arm and pointing. "It is crouching in the shadows on dark streets and shambling across the lawns of deserted parks and leering triumphantly upon its prey."

Little rose and laid his hand on Algernon's arm.

"Steady, my lad," he urged. "I haven't said I couldn't help. Though Chaugnar is a very terrible menace it isn't as omnipotent as Ulman thought. It and its brothers are incarnate manifestations of a very ancient, a very malignant uncleanliness—a cancer whose growth I can retard—at least retard. And if I am successful I can send it back to its foul lair beyond the galactic universe, can cut it asunder for ever from our three-dimensional world. Had I known that the horror still lurked in the Pyrenees I should have gone, months ago, to *send it back*. Yes, even though the thought of it now fills me with a terror and a loathing unspeakable, I should have gone.

"I am not," he continued, "a merely theoretical dreamer. Though I am by temperament disposed toward speculations of a mystical nature, I have forged a very concrete and effective weapon to combat the cosmic malignancies. If you'll step into my library I'll show you something which will a trifle restore your confidence."

6. *The Time-Space Machine*

ROGER LITTLE'S vast dim laboratory was illumed by a single bluish lamp imbedded in the concrete of its sunken floor. An infinite diversity of mechanisms lined the walls and sprawled their precise lengths on long low tables and dangled eerily from hooks set in the high domed ceiling; mechanisms a-glitter in blue-lit seclusion—a strange, bizarre foreglimpse into the alchemy and magic of a far-distant future, with spheres and levers and condensers and bells in lieu of stuffed crocodiles and steaming elixirs.

All of the contrivances were arresting, but one was so extraordinary in size and complexity that it dominated the others and riveted Algernon's attention. He seemed unable to drag his gaze from the thing. It was a strange agglomeration of metallic spheres and portions of spheres, of great bluish globes surrounded by tiny

clusters of half-globes and quarter-globes, whose surfaces converged in a most fantastic way. And from the globes there sprouted at grotesque angles metallic crescents with converging tips.

To Algernon's excited imagination the thing wore a quasi-reptilian aspect. "It's like a toad's face," he muttered. "Bulbous and bestial."

Little nodded. "It's a triumph of mechanical ugliness, isn't it? Yet 'twould have been deified in Attica—by Archimedes especially. He would have exalted it above all his Conoids and Parabolas."

"What function does it perform?" asked Algernon.

"A sublime one. It's a time-space machine. But I'd rather not discuss its precise function till I've shown you how it works. I want you to study its face as it waxes non-Euclidean. When you've glimpsed a fourth-dimensional figure you'll be prepared to concede, I think, that the claims I make for it are not extravagant. I know of no more certain corrective for an excess of skepticism. I was the *Critique of Pure Reason* personified until I looked upon a *skinned sphere*—then I grew very humble, reverent toward the great *Suspected*.

"Watch now." He reached forward, grasped a switch and with a swift downward movement of his right arm set the machine in motion. At first the small spheres and the crescents revolved quickly and the large spheres slowly; then the large spheres literally spun whilst the small spheres lazed, and then both small spheres and large spheres moved in unison. Then the spheres stopped altogether, but only for an instant, whilst something of movement seemed to flow into them from the revolving crescents. Then the crescents stopped and the spheres moved, in varying tempo, faster and faster, and their movement seemed to flow back into the crescents. Then both crescents and spheres began to move in unison, faster and faster and faster, till the entire mass seemed to merge into a shape paradoxical, outrageous, unthinkable—a sphenoid with a non-Euclidean face, a geometric blasphemy that was at once isosceles and equilateral, convex and concave.

Algernon stared in horror. "What in God's name is that?" he cried.

"You are looking on a fourth-dimensional figure," said Little soothingly. "Steady now."

For an instant nothing happened; then a light, greenish, blinding, shot from the center of the crazily distorted figure and streamed across the opposite wall, limning on the smooth cement a perfect circle.

But only for a second was the wall illumed. With an abrupt movement Little shot the lever upward and its radiance dimmed, vanished. "Another moment, and that wall would have crumbled away," he explained apologetically.

With fascination Algernon watched the outrageous sphenoid grow indistinct, watched it blur and disappear amidst a resurgence of spheres.

"That light," cried Little exultantly, "will send Chaugnar Faugn back through time. It will reverse its decadent *randomness*—disincarnate and disembody it, and send it back for ever."

"But I don't understand," murmured Algernon. "What do you mean by *randomness*."

"I mean that this machine can work havoc with entropy!" There was a ring of exaltation in Little's voice.

"Entropy?" Algernon scowled. "I'm not sure that I understand. I know what entropy is in thermodynamics, of course, but I'm not sure——"

"I'll explain," said Little. "You are of course familiar with the A B C's of Einsteinian physics and are aware that time is *relatively* arrowless, that the sequence in which we view events in nature is not a cosmic actuality and that our conviction

that we are going somewhere in time is a purely human emotion conditioned by our existence on this particular planet and the limitations which our five senses impose upon us. We divide time into past, present and future, but in reality an event's sequence in time depends wholly on the position in space from which it is viewed. Events which occurred thousands of years ago on this planet haven't as yet taken place to a hypothetical observer situated billions and billions of light years remote from us. Thus, cosmically speaking, we can not say of an event that it has happened and will never happen again or that it is about to happen and has never happened before, because "before" to us is "after" to intelligences situated elsewhere —if such intelligences exist.

"But though our familiar time-divisions are purely arbitrary there is omnipresent in nature a principle called entropy which, as Eddington has pointed out, equips time with a kind of empirical arrow. The entire universe appears to be 'running down.' It is the consensus of astronomical opinion that suns and planets and electrons are constantly breaking up, becoming more and more *disorganized*. Billions of years ago some mysterious dynamic, which Sir James Jeans likens to the Finger of God, streamed across primeval space and created the universe of stars in a state of almost perfect integration, welded them into a system so highly organized that there was only the tiniest manifestation of the random element anywhere in it. The random element in nature is the uncertain element—the principle which brings about disorganizations, disintegration, decay.

"Let us suppose that two mechanical men, robots, are tossing a small ball to and fro, to and fro. The process may go on indefinitely, for the mechanical creatures do not tire and there is nothing to make the ball swerve from its course. But now let us suppose that a bird in flight collides with the ball, sends it spinning so that it misses the hand of the receiving robot. What happens? Both robots begin to behave grotesquely. Missing the ball, their arms sweep through the empty air, making wider and wider curves and they stagger forward perhaps, and collapse in each other's arms. The random, the uncertain element has entered their organized cosmos and they have ceased to function.

"This tendency of the complex to disintegrate, of the perfectly-balanced to run amuck, is called entropy. It is entropy that provides time with an arrow and, disrupting nebulæ, plays midwife to the birth of planets from star-wombs incalculable. It is entropy that cools great orbs, hotter than Betelgeuse, more fiery than Arcturus through all the outer vastnesses, reducing them to sterility, to whirling motes of chaos.

"It is the random element that is slowly breaking up, destroying the universe of stars. In an ever widening circle, with an ever increasing malignancy—if one may ascribe malignancy to a force, a tendency—it works its awful havoc. It is analogous to a grain of sand dropped into one of the interstices of a vast and intricate machine —the grain creates a small disturbance which in turn creates a larger one, and so on *ad infinitum*.

"And with every event that has occurred on this earth since its departure from the sun there has been an increase of the random element. Thus we can legitimately 'place' events in time. Events which occurred tens of thousands of years ago may be happening *now* to intelligences situated elsewhere, and events still in the offing, so to speak, may exist already in another dimension of space-time. But if an earth-event is very disorganized and very decadent in its contours even our hypothetical distant observer would know that it has occurred very late in the course of cosmic 'evolution' and that a series of

happier events, with less of the random element in them, must have preceded it in time. In brief, that sense of time's passing which we experience in our daily lives is due to our intuitive perception that the structure of the universe is continuously breaking down. Everything that 'happens,' every event, is an objective manifestation of matter's continuous and all-pervasive decay and disintegration."

Algernon nodded. "I think I understand. But doesn't that negate all that we have been taught to associate with the word 'evolution'? It means that not advancement but an *inherent* degeneration has characterized all the processes of nature from the beginning of time. Can we apply it to man? Do you mean to suggest——"

Little shrugged. "One can only speculate. It may be that mediæval theology wasn't so very wrong after all—that old Augustine and the Angelic Doctor and Abelard and the others surmised correctly, that man was once akin to the angels and that he joined himself to nature's decay through a deliberate rejection of heaven's grace. It may be that by some mysterious and incomprehensibly perverse act of will he turned his face from his Maker and let evil pour in upon him; made of himself a magnet for all the malevolence that the cosmos holds. There may have been more than a little truth in Ulman's identification of Chaugnar with the Lucifer of mediæval myth."

"Is this," exclaimed Imbert reproachfully, "a proper occasion for a discussion of theology?"

"It isn't," Little acknowledged. "But I thought it desirable to outline certain—possibilities. I don't want you to imagine that I regard the intrusion of Chaugnar Faugn into our sane world as a scientifically explicable occurrence."

"I don't care how you regard it," affirmed Algernon, "so long as you succeed in destroying it utterly."

"I hate it as Aquinas hated the devil, as Anthony the succubi of the desert, as St. Simeon Stylites the shabby robustness of the go-getter."

"And yet you propose to combat it with science," exclaimed Imbert.

"With a concrete embodiment of the concepts of transcendental mathematics," corrected Little. "And such concepts are merely empirically scientific. I am aware that science may be loosely defined as a systematized accumulation of tendencies and principles, but classically speaking, its prime function is to convey some idea of the nature of reality by means of an inductive logic. Yet our mathematical physicist has turned his face from induction as resolutely as did the mediæval scholastics in the days of the Troubadours. He insists that we must start from the universal assumption that we can never know positively the real nature of anything, and that whatever 'truth' we may deduce from empirical generalities will be chiefly valuable as a kind of mystical guidepost, at best merely roughly indicative of the direction in which we are travelling; but withal, something of a sacrament and therefore superior to the dogmatic 'knowledge' of Nineteenth Century science. The speculations of mathematical physicists today are more like poems and psalms than anything else. They embody concepts wilder and more fantastic than anything in Poe or Hawthorne or Blake or Gautier or Hoffman."

He stepped forward and seized the entropy-reversing machine by its globular neck. "Two men can carry it very easily," he said, as he lifted it a foot from the floor by way of experiment. "We can train it on Chaugnar Faugn from an auto."

"If it keeps to the open streets," interjected Algernon. "We can't follow it up a fire-escape or into the woods in an auto."

"I'd thought of that. It could hide itself for days in Central Park or in the woods north of Dyckman Street. But we won't cross that bridge till we come to it." He moistened his lips. "We could dispense with the car in an emergency," he said. "Two men could advance fairly rapidly with the machine on a smooth expanse."

"We must make haste," he continued, after a moment. "My chauffeur's probably A. W. O. L., but I'll taxi down to the garage and fetch the car myself." He turned to Algernon. "If you want to help, locate Chaugnar Faugn."

Algernon stared. "But how——" he gasped.

"It shouldn't be difficult. Get in touch with the Manhattan police—Assistance and Ambulance Division. Ask if they've received any unusually urgent calls, anything of a sensational nature. If Chaugnar has slain again they'll know about it."

He pointed urgently toward a phone in the corner and dashed from the laboratory.

7. *A Cure for Skepticism*

When Algernon had completed his phone call he lit a cigarette very calmly and deliberately and crossed to where Doctor Imbert was standing. Only the trembling of his lower lip betrayed the agitation which racked him. "There have been five emergency calls," he said, "all from the midtown section—between Thirty-fifth and Forty-eighth Streets."

Imbert grew pale. "And—and deaths?"

Algernon nodded. "And deaths. Two of the ambulances have just returned."

"How many were killed?"

"They don't know yet. There were five bodies in the first ambulance—three men, a woman and a little girl—a negress. All horribly mutilated. They've gone wild over there. The chap who spoke to me wanted to know what I knew, why I had phoned—he shouted at me, broke down and sobbed."

"God!"

"There's nothing we can do till Little gets back," Algernon moaned.

"And then?" Imbert was in the throes of a mounting hysteria. "What do you suppose we can do then?"

"The machine——" Algernon began and stopped. He couldn't endure putting his faith into words. Rationally Little's machine was a grotesque jest, Little himself a lunatic, or worse. But it was necessary to believe in the machine, to have confidence in Little's sagacity—supreme confidence. It would have been disastrous to doubt in such a moment that a blow would eventually be struck, that Little and his machine together would dispose, for ever, of the ghastly menace of Chaugnar Faugn. But to defend such a faith rationally, to speak boldly and with confidence of a mere intuitive conviction was another matter.

"You know perfectly well that Little's insane," affirmed Imbert, "that it would be madness to credit his assertions." He gestured toward the machine. "That thing is merely a mechanical hypnotizer. Ingenious, I concede—it can induce twilight sleep with a rapidity I wouldn't have thought possible—but it is quite definitely three-dimensional. It brings the subconscious to the fore, the subconscious that believes everything it is told, induces temporary somnolence while Imbert whispers: 'You are gazing on a fourth-dimensional figure. You are gazing on a fourth-dimensional figure.'

"And of course you'd believe it. You'd believe it because you are such a confirmed skeptic and cynic. All skeptics are credulous in their under-consciousnesses. It's a sort of compensation. I believed it too, of course, but only momentarily. It's left no lasting impression on my conscious mind.

But you—you think Little's a god. You've been hypnotized and don't know it."

"I'd rather not discuss it," murmured Algernon. "I—I can't believe the figure we saw was wholly a deception. It was too ghastly and unbelievable. And remember that we both saw the same figure. I was watching you at the time—you looked positively ill. And mass hypnotism is virtually an impossibility. You ought to know that. No two men will respond to suggestion in the same way. We *both* saw a fourth-dimensional figure—an outrageous figure."

"But how do you know we both saw the same figure? We may easily have responded differently to Little's suggestion. Group hypnotism is possible in that sense. I saw something decidedly disturbing and so did you, but that doesn't prove that we weren't hypnotized."

"I'll convince you that we weren't," exclaimed Algernon. "A time-space machine of this nature isn't theoretically inconceivable, for physicists have speculated on the possibility of reversing entropy in isolated portions of matter for years. Watch now!"

Deliberately he walked to the machine and shot the lever upward.

8. *What Happened in the Laboratory*

ALGERNON raised himself on his elbow and stared in horror at the gaping hole in the wall before him. It was a great circular hole with jagged edges and through it the skyline of lower Manhattan glimmered nebulously, like an etching under glass. His temples throbbed painfully; his tongue was dry and swollen and it adhered to the roof of his mouth.

Some one was standing above him. Not Imbert, for Imbert wore spectacles. And this man's face was destitute of glitter, a blurred oval faultlessly white. Confusedly Algernon recalled that Little did not wear spectacles. This, then, was Little. Little, not Imbert. It was coming back now. He had sought to convince Imbert that the machine wasn't a mechanical hypnotizer. He had turned it on and then—good God! what had happened then? Something neither of them had anticipated. An explosion! But first for an instant they had seen the figure. And the light. And he and Imbert had been too frightened—too frightened to turn it off. How very clear it was all becoming. They had stood for an instant facing the wall, too utterly bewildered to turn off the light. And then Little had entered the room, had shouted a warning—a frenzied warning.

"Help me, please," exclaimed Algernon weakly.

Little bent and gripped him by the shoulders. "Steady, now," he commanded, as he guided him toward a chair. "You're not hurt. You'll be all right in a moment. Imbert, too, is all right. A piece of plaster struck him in the temple, gave him a nasty cut, but he'll be quite all right."

"But—what happened?" Algernon gestured helplessly toward the hole in the wall. "I remember that there was an explosion and that—you shouted at me, didn't you?"

"Yes, I shouted for you to get back—into the room. You were standing too close to the wall. Another instant and the floor would have crumbled too and you'd have had a nasty tumble—a tumble from which you wouldn't have recovered."

He smiled grimly and patted Algernon on the shoulder. "And that's that, me child. I'll get you a whisky and soda."

"But what, precisely, happened?" persisted Algernon.

"The light decreased the wall's *randomness,* sent it back through time. I warned you that the wall would crumble utterly away if the light rested on it for more than an instant. But you had to experiment."

"I'm sorry," muttered Algernon shamefacedly. "I fear I've ruined your apartment."

"Not important, really. It's eery, of course, having all one's secrets open to the sky, but my landlord will rectify that." He gazed at Algernon curiously. "Why did you do it?" he asked.

"To convince Imbert. He said the machine was merely a mechanical hypnotizer."

"I see, Imbert thought I was rather pathetically 'touched'."

"Not that exactly. I think he wanted to believe you——"

"But couldn't. Well, I can't blame him. Five years ago I would have doubted too—laughed all this to scorn. I approve of skeptics. They're dependable — when you've succeeded in convincing 'em that unthinkable and outrageous things occasionally have at least a pragmatic potency. I doubt if even now Imbert would concede that this is an entropy-reversing machine, but you may be sure his respect for it has grown. He'll obey me implicitly. And I want you to. We must act in unison if we are to exterminate Chaugnar Faugn."

Algernon began suddenly to tremble. "We haven't an instant to lose," he exclaimed. "Chaugnar is slaying in the streets. I got in touch with the police just before you came back—they're sending out ambulance calls from all over the city. It will destroy hundreds if we don't act instantly. Come, for God's sake——" Algernon had risen and was striding toward the door.

"Wait!" Little's voice held a note of command. "We've got to wait for Imbert. He's downstairs in the bathroom dressing his wound."

Reluctantly Algernon returned into the room.

"A few minutes' delay won't matter," continued Little, soothingly. "We've such a hideous ordeal before us that we should be grateful for this respite."

"But Chaugnar is killing now," protested Algernon. "And we are sitting here letting lives——"

"Be snuffed out? Perhaps. But at the same instant all over the world other lives are being snuffed out by diseases which men could prevent if they energetically bestirred themselves." He drew a deep breath. "We're doing the best we can, man. This respite is necessary for our nerves' sake. Try to view the situation sanely. If we are going to eradicate the abscess which is Chaugnar we'll need a surgeon's calm. We've got to steel our wills, extrude from our minds all hysterical considerations, and all sentiment. The salvation of our race is at stake."

"But it will kill hundreds," moaned Algernon. "In the crowded streets——"

"No," Little shook his head. "It is no longer in the streets. It has left the city."

"How do you know?"

"There has been a massacre on the Jersey coast—near Asbury Park. I stopped for an instant in the *Brooklyn Standard* office on my way up from the garage. The night staff is in a turmoil. They're rushing through a sensational morning extra. I found out something else. There has been a similar massacre in Spain! If we hadn't been talking here we'd have known. All of the papers ran columns about it—hours ago. They're correlating the dispatches now and by tomorrow every one will know of the menace. What I fear is mass hysteria."

"Mass hysteria?"

"Yes, they'll go mad in the city tomorrow—there'll be a stampede. A superstitious foreign population, you know. They'll go mad. Down on the East Side. Thousands of people will run amuck, pillage, destroy. There'll be more lives lost than Chaugnar destroyed tonight."

"But we can do something. We must."

"Yes, yes, of course. I said that we were merely waiting for Doctor Imbert."

He crossed to the eastern window and stared for a moment into the lightening sky. Then he returned to where Algernon was standing. "Do you feel better?" he asked. "Have you pulled yourself together?"

"Yes," muttered Algernon. "I am quite all right."

"Good."

The door opened and Imbert came in. His face was distraught and of a deathly pallor, but a look of relief came into his eyes when they rested on Algernon. "I feared you were seriously hurt," he cried. "We were quite mad to experiment with —with that thing."

"We must experiment again, I fear." Little's voice held gravest urgency.

"Well, so be it. I'm ready to join you. What do you want us to do?"

"I want you and Harris to carry that machine downstairs and put it into my car. I've got to go for an electric torch. To illume our Golgotha," he murmured, as he passed through the door.

9. *The Horror Moves*

"WE MUST overtake it before it reaches the crossroads," shouted Little.

They were speeding by the sea, tearing at seventy miles an hour down a long, white road that twisted and turned betwixt ramparts of sand. On both sides there towered dunes, enormous, majestic, morning stars a-glitter on the dark waters intermittently visible beyond their seaward walls. The horseshoe-shaped isthmus extended for six miles into the sea and then doubled back toward the Jersey coast. At the point where it changed its direction stood a crossroad, explicitly sign-posted with two pointing hands. One of these junctions led directly toward the mainland, the other into a dense, ocean-defiled waste, marshy and impregnable, a kind of morass where anything or any one might hide indefinitely.

And toward this retreat Chaugnar fled. For hours Little's car had pursued it along the tarred and macadamized roads that fringe the Jersey coast—over bridges and viaducts and across wastes of sand, in a straight line from Asbury Park to Atlantic City and then across country and back again to the coast, and now adown a thin terrain lashed by Atlantic spray, deserted save for a few ramshackle huts of fishermen and a vast congregation of gulls.

Little and his companions were in the throes of a consuming terror. Chaugnar Faugn had moved with unbelievable rapidity, from the instant when they had first encountered it crouching somnolently in the shadows beneath a deserted bathhouse at Long Branch and had turned the light on it and watched it awake to the moment when it had gone shambling away through the darkness its every movement had been ominous with menace.

Twice it had stopped in the road and waited for them to approach and once its great arm had raised itself against them in a gesture of malignant defiance. And on that occasion only the entropy machine had saved them. Its light Chaugnar could not bear, and when Little had turned the ray upon the creature's flanks the great obscene body had heaved and shuddered and a ghastly screeching had issued from its bulbous lips. And then forward again it had forged, its thick, stumpy legs moving with the rapidity of pistons—carrying it over the ground so rapidly that the car could not keep pace.

But always its tracks had remained visible, for a phosphorescence streamed from them, illuming its retreat. And always its hoarse bellowing could be heard in the distance, freighted with fury

and a hatred incalculable. And by the stench, too, they trailed it, for all the air through which it passed was acridly defiled—pungent with an uncleanliness that evades description.

"It is infinitely old," cried Little as he maneuvered the car about the base of a sea-lashed dune. "As old as the earth's crust. It would have crumbled, else. You saw how the bathhouse crumbled—how the shells beneath its feet dissolved and vanished. It is only its age that saves it."

"You had the light on it for five minutes," shouted Algernon. His voice was hoarse with excitement. "And it still lives. What can we do?"

"We must corner it—keep the light directed at it for—many minutes. To send it back we must decrease the random element in it by a billion years. It has remained substantially as it is now for at least that long. Perhaps longer."

"How many years of earth-time does the machine lop off a minute?" shouted Imbert.

"Can't tell exactly. It works differently with different objects. Metals, stone, wood all have a different entropy-rhythm. But roughly, it should reverse entropy throughout a billion years of earth-time in ten or fifteen minutes."

"There it is!" shouted Algernon. "It's reached the crossroads. Look!"

Against a windshield glazed with sea-mist Imbert laid his forehead, peering with bulging eyes at the form of Chaugnar, phosphorescently illumed a quarter-mile before them on the road, and even as he stared the distance between the car and the loathsome horror diminished by fifty yards.

"It isn't moving," cried Little. He had half risen from his seat and was gripping the wheel as though it were a live thing. "It's waiting for us. Turn on the light, sir. Quick! for God's sake! We're almost on top of it!"

Algernon fell upon his knees in the dark and groped about for the switch. The engine's roar increased as Little stepped furiously upon the accelerator. "The light, quick!" Little screamed the words.

Algernon's fingers found the switch and thrust it sharply upward. There ensued the drone of revolving spheres whilst Little raved. "It's moving again. God, it's moving!"

Algernon rose shakingly to his feet. "Where is it?" he shouted. "I don't see it!"

"It's making for the marshes," shrilled Little. "Look. Straight ahead, through here." He pointed toward a clear spot in the windshield. Craning hysterically, Algernon descried a phosphorescent bulk making off over the narrowest of the bisecting roads.

With a frantic spin of the wheel Little turned the car about and sent the speedometer soaring. The road grew narrower and more uneven as they advanced along it and the car careened perilously. "Careful," shouted Algernon. "We'll get ditched. Better slow up."

"No," screamed Little. "We can't stop now."

The light from the machine was streaming unimpeded into the darkness before them.

"Keep it trained on the road," cautioned Little. "It would destroy a man in an instant."

They could smell the mud flats now. A pungent salty odor of stagnant brine and putrescent shellfish drifted toward them, whipped by the wind. A sickly yellow light was spreading sluggishly in the eastern sky. Across the road ahead of them a turtle shambled and vanished hideously in a flash.

"See that?" cried Little. "That's how Chaugnar would go if it wasn't as old as the earth."

"Be ready with the brakes," advised Algernon.

The end of the road had swept into view. It ran swiftly downhill for fifty yards and terminated in a sandy waste that was half submerged at its lower levels. The illumed bulk of Chaugnar paused for an instant on a sandy hillock. Then it moved rapidly downward toward the flats, arms spread wide, body swaying strangely, as though it were in awe of the sea.

Little steered the car to the side of the road and threw on the brakes. "Out—both of you!" he shrieked.

Hysterically Algernon clambered to the ground and stood for an instant shakingly clinging to the door of the car. Then, in a sudden access of determination, he sprang back and began tugging at the machine, whilst Imbert strove valiantly to assist and enhearten.

Came a bellow from the great form that was advancing into the marsh. Algernon drew close to Little, grasping his arm and pouring out a plea for sobriety and caution. "Hadn't we better wait here?" he whispered. "It seems to fear the sea. We can entrench ourselves here and attack it with the light when it climbs back."

"No," Little's voice was emphatic. "We haven't a second to waste. It may—mire itself. We'll drive it forward into the marsh, trust to the mud. Quick now."

Resolutely he stooped and beckoned to his companions to assist him in raising and supporting the machine. Dawn was spreading in the east as the three men staggered downward over the sandy waste, a planet's salvation in the glittering shape they carried.

Straight into the morass they went, quaking with terror but impelled by a determination that was oblivious to caution. From Chaugnar there now came an insistent screeching and bellowing, a noise that smote so ominously on Algernon's ear that he wanted, desperately, to drop the machine and flee. But above the obscene bellowings of the horror rose Little's voice in courageous exhortation. "Don't stop for an instant," he cried. "We must keep it from circling back to the road. It'll turn in a moment. It's sinking deeper and deeper. It will have to turn."

Their shoes sank into rotting heaps of squashy bivalves and sea-soaked marsh weeds, whilst luridly across the glistening morass streamed the greenish light from the machine, effacing everything in its path save the mud itself, which merely bubbled unctuously, made younger in an instant by ten thousand years. And then, suddenly, the great thing turned and faced them.

KNEE-DEEP in the soft mud it turned, its glowing flanks quivering with ire, its huge trunk malignly upraised, a flail of flame. For an instant it loomed thus terribly menacing, the soul of all malignancy and horror, a cancerous cyclops oozing fetor. Then the light swept over it, and it recoiled in a revulsion hideous to witness. Though half mired, it retreated awfully, and its bellows turned to hoarse gurglings, such as no animal throat has uttered in all earth's eons of sentient evolution.

And then, slowly, it began to change. As the light streamed over and enveloped it, it quivered with agony, and began unmistakably to shrivel and darken.

"Keep the light steady," screamed Little through moistless lips. His features were set in an expression of utter revulsion and his cheeks had a purplish cast. With palsied arms Algernon and Imbert advanced with the machine, their lips mumbling invocations, their eyes fixed in a glassy tumescence.

And now that which had taken to

itself an earth-form in eons primordial began awfully to disincarn and before their gaze was enacted a drama so revolting as to imperil reason. A burning horror withdrew from its garments of clay and retraced in patterns of unspeakable dimness the history of its enshrinement. Not instantly had it incarned itself, but by stages slow and fantasmal and sickening. To ascend, Chaugnar had had to feast, not on men at first, for there were no men when it lay stickily and venomously outspread on the earth's crust, but on entities no less malignant than itself, the excrements of star-births incalculable. For ere the earth cooled she had drawn from the skies a noxious progeny, which had roamed and ravened on her body, like vermin, like leeches. Drawn earthward by her holocaust they had come, and relentlessly Chaugnar had devoured them.

And now as that which had occurred in the beginning was enacted anew these blasphemies were disgorged, and above the dark wrack defilement spread. And at last from a beast-shape to a jelly Chaugnar passed, a jelly spiralled in smoke and green flame indescribable. For an instant it moved above the black marsh, as it had moved in the beginning when it had come down from outer space to wax bestial in the presence of man. And then the flames vanished and nothing remained but a cold wind blowing and a spirit of evil loose and ravening in the void above them.

Little let out a great cry and Algernon released his hold on the machine and dropped to his knees on the wet earth. Imbert, too, relinquished the machine, but before doing so he shot back the lever and directed its fall so that it would land where the mud was firmest.

Then the three men embraced one another and began wildly to rejoice. But only for an instant did their victory go unchallenged. For before the spheres on the prostrate machine had ceased to revolve, before even the light had vanished from the gleaming waste, the malignancy that had been Chaugnar reshaped itself in the sky above them.

Indescribably it loomed through the gray sea-mists, its bulk magnified a thousandfold, its trunk a horror Gargantuan, demoniac, sounding in its frenzied writhings a knell which banished hope. A cry of fright almost animalistically inarticulate came from Algernon's throat, whilst Imbert fell forward upon the ground and beat with his fists at the base of the discarded machine. Only Little faced it standing, with head uptossed and countenance illumed by a sublime, an undreamed-of courage.

Something like lust shone in the horror's eyes. For a second it hung above them, glaring venomously. Then, like a racer, it stooped and floundered forward and went groping about with its monstrous hands for the little shapes it hated. Its mouth, as it groped, drooled phosphorescent saliva, and an odor of corruption surged from its cyclopean flanks.

10. Little's Explanation

It was the fifth day since Chaugnar Faugn had been sent back through time. Algernon and Little sat in the latter's laboratory and discussed the loathsome event over cups of black coffee.

"You think, then, that the last manifestation we saw was purely spectral?"

"Not wholly, perhaps," replied Little. "It stunk, you know. An odor of putrefaction came from it. I should regard the phenomenon as a kind of tenuous reassembling. Chaugnar had been incarnate for so long in the hideous shape with which we are familiar that its disembodied intelligence could reclothe itself in a kind of porous mimesis before it re-

turned to its fourth-dimensional sphere. So rapidly did our machine reverse entropy that perhaps tiny fragments of its terrestrial body survived, and these, by a tremendous exercise of will, it may have reassembled and, figuratively, *blown up*. That is to say, it may have taken these tiny fragments and so increased their porosity beyond the normal porosity of matter that they produced the cyclopean apparition we saw. All matter, you know, is tremendously porous, and if I could remove all the 'vacuums' from your body you would shrink to the size of a pin-head."

Algernon shuddered. "It was more baneful and abhorrent than Chaugnar incarned," he murmured. "I thought myself done for. And Imbert, poor fellow, will never get over the shock. Seen him recently?"

Little shook his head.

"He looks ghastly. Ten years older and eighty pounds leaner. And quite unable to speak without stuttering. He seldom leaves his home and is threatened with a neurotic complex—a fear of open spaces."

Little sighed. "I'm damnably sorry. Imbert is a star of the first Yankee magnitude."

For a moment Algernon was silent. Then he stood up, laid his coffee cup on the window-sill and crossed to where Little was sitting. "We agreed," he said, "that we wouldn't discuss Chaugnar till time had a little dulled the horror's edge. It was a wise decision, I think, for I was trembling on the verge of a neural collapse, and there were certain incidents, certain — bizarreries which I wanted desperately to forget. Yet I'm now so certain that what we both witnessed was not an illusion that I must insist you return an *honest* answer to two questions. I shall not expect a comprehensive and wholly satisfying explanation, for I'm aware that you do not know yourself the exact nature of Chaugnar. But you have at least formed an hypothesis and I'm sure that with your vast occult erudition you can supply a key that will throw, if I may speak in jumbled metaphor, a glimmer of light on that most hideous enigma."

"What do you wish to know?" Little's voice was constrained, reluctant.

"What destroyed the horror in the Pyrenees? Why were there no more massacres after—after that night?"

Little smiled wanly. "Have you forgotten the pools of black slime which were found on the melting snow a thousand feet above the village three days after we sent Chaugnar back?"

"You mean——"

Little nodded. "Chaugnar's kin, undoubtedly. They accompanied Chaugnar back, but left, like their master, a few remainders. Little round pools of putrescent dark slime—a superfluity of rottenness that somehow resisted the entropy-reversing action of the machine."

"You mean that the machine sent lethal emanations half across the world?"

Little shook his head. "I mean simply that Chaugnar Faugn and its hideous brethren were *joined together* in the fourth dimension and that we destroyed them simultaneously. It is an axiom of virtually every speculative philosophy based on the newer physics and the concepts of non-Euclidean mathematics that we can't perceive the real *relations* of objects in the external world, that since our senses permit us to view them merely three-dimensionally we can't perceive the fourth-dimensional links which unite them.

"If we could see the same objects—men, trees, chairs, houses—on a fourth-dimensional plane we'd notice connections that are now wholly unsuspected by us. My chair, for instance, may actually

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be joined to the window-ledge yonder, and to you also, and to the Woolworth Building. Or you and I may be but infinitesimally tiny fragments of some gigantic monster occupying vast segments of space-time. You may be a mere excrescence on the monster's back, and I a hair of its head—I speak metaphorically, of course, since in the fourth dimension there can be nothing but analogies to objects on the terrestrial globe—or you and I and all men, and everything in the world, every particle of matter, may be but a single fragment of this larger entity. If anything should happen to the entity you and I would *both* suffer, but as the monster would be invisible to us, no one—no one equipped with normal human organs of awareness—would suspect that we were suffering because we were parts of *it*. To a three-dimensional observer we should appear to be suffering from different causes and our invisible fourth-dimensional *solidarity* would remain wholly unsuspected.

"If two people were thus fourth-dimensionally joined, like Siamese twins, and one of them were destroyed by a machine similar to the one we used against Chaugnar Faugn, the other would suffer effacement at the same instant, though he were on the opposite side of the world."

Algernon looked puzzled.

"But why should the link be invisible? Assuming that Chaugnar Faugn and the Pyrenean horrors were fourth-dimensionally joined together—either because they were parts of one great monster, or merely because they were—well, *one* in the fourth-dimensional sphere, why should this fourth-dimensional connecting link be invisible to us?"

"My dear chap, you are positively obtuse. If you were a *two* instead of a three-dimensional entity, if, when you regarded objects about you—chairs, houses, animals—you saw only their length and breadth, you wouldn't be able to form any intelligible conception of their relations to other objects in the dimension you couldn't apprehend — the dimension of *thickness*. Only a portion of an ordinary three-dimensional object would be visible to you and you could only make a mystical guess as to how it would look with another dimension added to it. In that, to you, unperceivable dimension of thickness it might join itself to a thousand other objects and you'd never suspect that such a connection existed. You might perceive hundreds of flat surfaces about you, all disconnected, and you would never imagine that they formed one object in the third dimension.

"You would live in a two-dimensional world and when three-dimensional objects intruded into that world you would be unaware of their true objective conformation—or relatively unaware, for your perceptions would be perfectly valid so long as you remained two-dimensional.

"Our perceptions of the three-dimensional world are only valid for that world —to a fourth-dimensional entity our conceptions of objects external to us must seem utterly ludicrous. And we know that such entities exist. Chaugnar Faugn was such an entity. And because of its fourth-dimensional — perhaps fifth and sixth dimensional nature—it was joined to the horror on the hills in a way we weren't able to perceive. We can perceive connections when they have length, breadth and thickness, but when a new dimension is added they pass out of our ken, precisely as a solid object passes out of the ken of an observer in a dimension lower than ours. Have I clarified your perplexities?"

Algernon nodded. "I think—yes, I am sure that you have. But I should like to ask you another question. Do you believe that Chaugnar Faugn is a transcendant

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world-soul endowed with a supernatural incorporeality, or just—just an entity? I mean, was Ulman's priest right and was Chaugnar an incarnation of the acroamatic Oneness of the Brahmic mysteries, the portentous all-in-all of theosophists and occultists, or just a spawnment of the physical universe?"

Little took a long sip of coffee and very deliberately lowered his head, as though he were marshalling his convictions for a debate. "I believe I once told you," he said at last, "that I didn't believe Chaugnar Faugn could be destroyed by any agent less transcendental than that which we used against it. It certainly wasn't protoplasmic or mineral, and no mechanical device not based on relativist concepts could have effected the dissolution we witnessed. An infra-red ray machine, for instance, or an atom-disintegrator, assuming that such a marvel existed, would have been powerless to send it back. Yet despite the transcendental nature of even its carnate shell, despite the fact that even in its earth-shape it was fashioned of a substance unknown on the earth and that we can form no conception of its shape in the multidimensional sphere it now inhabits, it is my opinion that it is inherently, like ourselves, a circumscribed entity—the spawn of remote stars and unholy dimensions, but a creature and not a creator, a creature obeying inexorable laws and occupying a definite niche in the universe.

"In a way that we can never understand it had acquired the ability to roam and could incarn itself loathsomely in dimensions lower than its own. But I do not believe it possessed the attributes of deity. It was neither beneficent nor evil, but simply amorally virulent. Cosmically and amorally virulent—a purulent uncleanliness from far stars strayed by chance into our little mundane world."

"But do you believe that it actually made a race of men to serve it?—that the Miri Nigri were fashioned from the flesh of primordial amphibians?"

Little frowned. "I do not know. Conditions on the crustal earth may once have been such that creations of that nature were constantly occurring. And we may be sure that Chaugnar Faugn with its inscrutable endowments could have fashioned men-shapes had it so desired—could have fashioned them even from the organic alluvium of primeval strands."

Little lowered his voice and leaned forward on his elbow. "Some day," he murmured, "Chaugnar may return. We sent it back through time, but in ten or twenty or a hundred thousand years it may return to ravage. Its return will be presaged in dreams, for when its brethren waxed agile on the Spanish hills both I and the Chinaman were disturbed in our sleep by harbingers from beyond. Telepathically to sleeping minds Chaugnar spoke, and when it returns it will speak again; for man is not isolated among the sentient beings of earth but is linked to all that moves in fourth-dimensional continuity."

[THE END]

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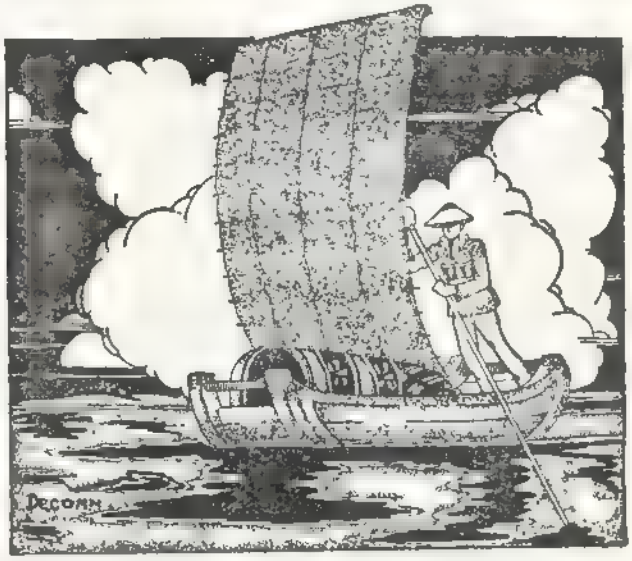

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On the River*

By GUY DE MAUPASSANT

I HAD rented, last summer, a little country house on the banks of the Seine a few miles from Paris, and I used to go down there every night to sleep. In a few days I made the acquaintance of one of my neighbors, a man between thirty and forty, who was certainly the most curious type that I had ever met. He was an old rowing man, crazy about rowing, always near the water, always on the water, always in the water. He must have been born in a boat, and he would certainly die in a boat at last.

One night, while we were walking together along the Seine, I asked him to tell me some stories about his life upon the river; and at that the good man suddenly became animated, transfigured, eloquent, almost poetical! In his heart there was one great passion, devouring and irresistible—the river.

"Ah!" said he to me, "how many memories I have of that river which is flowing there beside us! You people who live in streets, you don't know what the river is. But just listen to a fisherman simply pronouncing the word. For him it is the thing mysterious, the thing profound, unknown, the country of mirage and of fantasmagoria, where one sees, at night, things which do not exist, where one hears strange noises, where one trembles causelessly, as though crossing a graveyard. And it is, indeed, the most sinister of graveyards—a graveyard where there are no tombstones.

"To the fisherman the land seems limited, but of dark nights, when there is no moon, the river seems limitless. Sailors have no such feeling for the sea. Hard she often is and wicked, the great Sea; but she cries, she shouts, she deals with you fairly, while the river is silent and treacherous. It never even mutters, it flows ever noiselessly, and this eternal flowing movement of water terrifies me far more than the high seas of ocean.

"Dreamers pretend that the Sea hides in her breast great blue regions where drowned men roll to and fro among the huge fish, in the midst of strange forests and in crystal grottos. The river has only black depths, where one rots in the slime. For all that it is beautiful when it glitters in the rising sun or swashes softly along between its banks where the reeds murmur.

"The poet says of the ocean:

" 'Oh seas, you know sad stories! Deep seas, feared by kneeling mothers, you tell the stories to one another at flood tides!

*Translated from the French.

And that is why you have such despairing voices when at night you come toward us nearer and nearer.'

"Well, I think that the stories murmured by the slender reeds with their little soft voices must be yet more sinister than the gloomy dramas told by the howling of the high seas.

"But, since you ask for some of my recollections, I will tell you a curious adventure which I had here about ten years ago.

"I then lived, as I still do, in the house of the old lady Lafon, and one of my best chums, Louis Bernet, who has now given up for the Civil Service his oars, his low shoes, and his sleeveless jersey, lived in the village of C——, two leagues farther down. We dined together every day—sometimes at his place, sometimes at mine.

"One evening as I was returning home alone and rather tired, wearily pulling my heavy boat, a twelve-footer, which I always used at night, I stopped a few seconds to take breath near the point where so many reeds grow, down that way, about two hundred meters before you come to the railroad bridge. It was a beautiful night; the moon was resplendent, the river glittered, the air was calm and soft. The tranquillity of it all tempted me; I said to myself that to smoke a pipe just here would be extremely nice. Action followed upon the thought; I seized my anchor and threw it into the stream.

"The boat, which floated down again with the current, pulled the chain out to its full length, then stopped; and I seated myself in the stern on a sheepskin, as comfortable as possible. One heard no sound—no sound; only sometimes I thought I was aware of a low, almost insensible lapping of the water along the bank, and I made out some groups of reeds which, taller than their fellows,

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took on surprizing shapes, and seemed from time to time to stir.

"The river was perfectly still, but I felt myself moved by the extraordinary silence which surrounded me. All the animals—the frogs and toads, those nocturnal singers of the marshes—were silent. Suddenly on my right, near me, a frog croaked; I started; it was silent; I heard nothing more, and I resolved to smoke a little by way of a distraction. But though I am, so to speak, a regular blackener of pipes, I could not smoke that night; after the second puff I sickened of it, and I stopped. I began to hum a tune; the sound of my voice was painful to me; so I stretched myself out in the bottom of the boat and contemplated the sky.

"For some time I remained quiet, but soon the slight movements of the boat began to make me uneasy. I thought that it was yawing tremendously, striking now this bank of the stream, and now that; then I thought that some Being or some invisible force was dragging it down gently to the bottom of the water, and then was lifting it up simply to let it fall again. I was tossed about as though in the midst of a storm; I heard noises all around me; with a sudden start I sat upright; the water sparkled, everything was calm.

"I saw that my nerves were unsettled, and I decided to go. I pulled in the chain; the boat moved; then I was conscious of resistance; I pulled harder; the anchor did not come up, it had caught on something at the bottom of the river and I could not lift it. I pulled again—in vain. With my oars I got the boat round up-stream in order to change the position of the anchor. It was no use; the anchor still held. I grew angry, and in a rage I shook the chain. Nothing moved. There was no hope of breaking the chain, or of getting it loose from my craft, because it was very heavy, and riveted at the bow into a bar of wood thicker than my arm; but since the weather continued fine, I reflected that I should not have to wait long before meeting some fisherman, who would come to my rescue. My mishap had calmed me; I sat down, and I was now able to smoke my pipe. I had a flask of brandy with me; I drank two or three glasses, and my situation made me laugh. It was very hot, so that, if needs must, I could pass the night under the stars without inconvenience.

"Suddenly a little knock sounded against the side. I started, and a cold perspiration froze me from head to foot. The noise came, no doubt, from some bit of wood drawn along by the current, but it was enough, and I felt myself again overpowered by a strange nervous agitation. I seized the chain, and I stiffened myself in a desperate effort. The anchor held. I sat down exhausted.

"But, little by little, the river had covered itself with a very thick white mist, which crept low over the water, so that, standing up, I could no longer see either the stream or my feet or my boat, and saw only the tips of the reeds, and then, beyond them, the plain, all pale in the moonlight, and with great black stains which rose toward heaven, and which were made by clumps of Italian poplars. I was as though wrapped to the waist in a cotton sheet of a strange whiteness, and there began to come to me weird imaginations. I imagined that some one was trying to climb into my boat, since I could no longer see it, and that the river, hidden by this opaque mist, must be full of strange creatures swimming about me. I experienced a horrible uneasiness, I had a tightening at the temples, my heart beat to suffocation; and, losing my head, I thought of escaping by swimming; then

in an instant the very idea made me shiver with fright. I saw myself lost, drifting hither and thither in this impenetrable mist, struggling among the long grass and the reeds which I should not be able to avoid, with a rattle in my throat from fear, not seeing the shore, not finding my boat. And it seemed to me as though I felt myself being drawn by the feet down to the bottom of this black water.

"In fact, since I should have had to swim up-stream at least five hundred meters before finding a point clear of rushes and reeds, where I could get a footing, there were nine chances to one that, however good a swimmer I might be, I should lose my bearings in the fog and drown.

"I tried to reason with myself. I realized that my will was firmly enough resolved against fear; but there was something in me besides my will, and it was this which felt afraid. I asked myself what it could be that I dreaded; that part of me which was courageous railed at that part of me which was cowardly; and I never had comprehended so well before the opposition between those two beings which exist within us, the one willing, the other resisting, and each in turn getting the mastery.

"This stupid and inexplicable fear grew until it became terror. I remained motionless, my eyes wide open, with a strained and expectant ear. Expecting—what? I did not know save that it would be something terrible. I believe that if a fish, as often happens, had taken it into its head to jump out of the water, it would have needed only that to make me fall stark on my back into a faint.

"And yet, finally, by a violent effort, I very nearly recovered the reason which had been escaping me. I again took my brandy-flask, and out of it I drank great drafts. Then an idea struck me, and I began to shout with all my might, turn-

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ing in succession toward all four quarters of the horizon. When my throat was completely paralyzed, I listened. A dog howled, a long way off.

"Again I drank; and I lay down on my back in the bottom of the boat. So I remained for one hour, perhaps for two, sleepless, my eyes wide open, with nightmares all about me. I did not dare to sit up, and yet I had a wild desire to do so; I kept putting it off from minute to minute. I would say to myself: 'Come! get up!' and I was afraid to make a movement. At last I raised myself with infinite precaution, as if life depended on my making not the slightest sound, and I peered over the edge of the boat.

"I was dazzled by the most marvelous, the most astonishing spectacle that it can be possible to see. It was one of those fantasmagoria from fairyland; it was one of those visions described by travellers returned out of far countries, and which we hear without believing.

"The mist, which two hours before was floating over the water, had gradually withdrawn and piled itself upon the banks. Leaving the river absolutely clear, it had formed, along each shore, long low hills about six or seven meters high, which glittered under the moon with the brilliancy of snow, so that one saw nothing except this river of fire coming down these two white mountains; and there, high above my head, a great, luminous moon, full and large, displayed herself upon a blue and milky sky.

"All the denizens of the water had awaked; the bullfrogs croaked furiously, while, from instant to instant, now on my right, now on my left, I heard those short, mournful, monotonous notes which the brassy voices of the marsh-frogs give forth to the stars. Strangely enough, I was no longer afraid; I was in the midst of such an extraordinary landscape that the most curious things could not have astonished me.

"How long the sight lasted I do not know, because at last I had grown drowsy. When I again opened my eyes the moon had set, the heaven was full of clouds. The water lashed mournfully, the wind whispered, it grew cold, the darkness was profound.

"I drank all the brandy I had left; then I listened shiveringly to the rustling of the reeds and to the sinister noise of the river. I tried to see, but I could not make out the boat nor even my own hands, though I raised them close to my eyes.

"However, little by little the density of the blackness diminished. Suddenly I thought I felt a shadow slipping along near by me; I uttered a cry; a voice replied—it was a fisherman. I hailed him; he approached, and I told him of my mishap. He pulled his boat alongside, and both together we heaved at the chain. The anchor did not budge. The day came on—somber, gray, rainy, cold—one of those days which bring always a sorrow and a misfortune. I made out another craft; we hailed it. The man aboard of it joined his efforts to ours: then, little by little, the anchor yielded. It came up, but slowly, slowly, and weighted down by something very heavy. At last we perceived a black mass, and we pulled it alongside.

"It was the corpse of an old woman with a great stone round her neck."

Tzo-Lin's Nightingales

(Continued from page 174)

extreme violence that made my teeth knock; then my shoulder struck something sharp, and I awoke. A single glance above me, ahead of me, over my shoulder, and I leaped to my feet, shaking and shrieking for terror with all the strength of my lungs.

Where once shelf upon shelf had borne up a thousand odds and ends of brasses and statuary, many compartments layered with dust and cobwebs glowered emptily out of the darkness. The ceiling had fallen through at irregular intervals, and six or seven of the blackened beams strewed the floor, straddling the breadth of the room diagonally, like prone colossi. On every joint and cornice the spiders had woven heavily, and, as if to reinforce their workmanship, a dust, like pumice-powder, had settled on every thread, and clotted. But more than this, more than the horror of dust and spiders, it was the swift glimpse of the two figures in the rear of the room that left me weak and tortured with a terrible unrest for so many months after.

Two figures. And I saw them just at the moment the trap-door over my head was lifted, in response to my insane pummelings (I had heard the scrape of feet somewhere above me and guessed myself to be in a cellar of some sort). Two figures. One a man, the other a woman; both in glittering, flower-painted robes, lying with phosphorescent pallor and green horror on their faces, arms interlocked and veiled over three times with cobwebs, while cage after cage, each holding a single brown figure like a bird within it, glimmered silently in a wide circle above their heads. . . .

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Siva the Destroyer

(Continued from page 169)

enigma like a wall, falling back, trying to scale it again. I rehearsed every part of it I had witnessed, I kept turning it over and over. After a long time the telephone broke in on me. It was the laboratory, calling to report the success of their efforts with the plates. Their analysis had got nowhere, their attempts had been fruitless; the substance of the plates was metallic, but it was something totally unknown to them, something of a new atomic structure. If it was a composition it was according to a formula that physical science knew nothing about.

I returned to my fruitless mental struggle. I lay at full length on the bed, my eyes closed, my mind moving like a weary treadmill. Time passed; the hotel grew quiet; the noise of planes arriving and departing on the roof fins around me grew more infrequent. By degrees I sank into a semi-doze.

How much later I awoke I do not know, but I awoke with that start a person has when there is a sharp noise near him. For an instant I could not place it; then it came again, a sharp creak of wood to the left. My eyes swung that way. The window was slowly opening.

The window was opening and there was no one outside.

The room was entirely dark. My gun was in my coat across the room. The sash had already opened wide enough to admit the passage of a man.

Feet jumped cat-like to the floor.

By an enormous effort of will I held my body perfectly still. It was my only chance. If I sprang up for my revolver I was defenseless. My only hope was waiting until he came to me. There was no other.

Siva had got to me.

I kept my body rigid with my whole strength; it was an appalling effort; the sweat stood out on my skin. The feet moved softly across the rug. Slowly, softly. Cautiously. As though with hands outspread he was seeking among the darkness of the room.

Something soft like a hand touched the bottom of the bed.

I turned my elbows the barest fraction, to get my hands free. The feet crept nearer, stopped. They were standing beside me. An indistinct sound of breathing was above me. It bent closer.

I sprang from beneath with all my strength at the position of that sound. My arms clasped something like a neck; I swung on it, kicking out, pivoting, throwing myself forward at the floor. We crashed down; sharp pain bit my side; I swung my fists heavily into the shape, metal gave under my knuckles. I tried to spring back; he had me by the leg; I kicked out savagely; we reeled, clawed, rolled on the floor; steel cut by my cheek; I twisted free, I was up. I turned to dive for my coat and hit a chair; I stumbled headlong. Before I could recover he was on me; something cut into the floor with a zip of metal; I swung the chair by one leg and connected; I was free again. He was gone from me now into some other part of the room; I crashed around blindly once or twice and then stopped, motionless, listening, crouching.

No sound came. I tried to hear his breathing, tried to locate him. I could not. I knew not what other weapons he had beside the knife I had felt. I dared

ot move. He was stalking me in that ark room.

From twenty feet away came the si-nced spit of a revolver.

I plunged headlong at that flash with ıe chair raised over my head. One ıance in a million. If I missed he ould riddle the room till he found me.

I hit the corner, swinging the chair raight down. Crash! Something was ıere. Something was moving. The gun ɔat. I swung furiously, madly, unceas-ıgly, using the chair like an ax. Wild ɔunds were coming from my throat.

There was silence.

I crouched for a moment panting, eaving, my throat rasping. I thrust one and forward. The body was still.

I ran across to the lights and flashed ıem on. My cheek was bleeding, my nuckles were torn. I whipped out my nife, ran to the prostrate form, began to p away the plates.

A body came into view.

The burns were fresh, smaller, less eep. The flesh was warm. I worked ıpidly, feverishly. I worked up to the ead, exposed the neck, the chin, the ıeek. I sprang back with a cry.

I ran desperately for water, ran back, ung it over that insensible face.

The lips parted, shuddered, the eyes pened. It was Van West!

Van West, the young science graduate, ıe man who had been going as assistant ɔ Doctor Khalid Bey!

His lips moved. Life was in his eyes. 'he double shock had riven through the ɔma that held his mind.

I bent down. "Who is it? Who is ? Who has done this to you?"

He murmured in a tortured voice: Khalid Bey."

Khalid Bey!

Khalid Bey was Siva!

I stood upright with the shock.

I leaned over him again, forcing his

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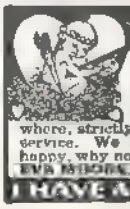

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eyes, compelling his waning attention.

"Where is he?" I said. "Where has he gone? Where is the place you were to return?"

A jumble of words came from his lips, incoherent, meaningless, but among them were figures which taken together made an aeronautical position over the Sahara.

He was unconscious again.

I sprang for the phone, called the hotel doctor, carried the limp form of Van West to the bed. Then I ran to the window, climbed the fire escape to the roof fin, ran to the dark shape of my Bat.

The night was black. The roof was silent. The way the Bat's nose pointed was the direction of the Sahara.

I STREAKED like a meteor through the black sky. As my eyes automatically picked up guiding lights, as my hands automatically corrected my position, my mind was still held by the incredible truth. Khalid Bey was Siva. The warning he had received was merely a ruse, to remove him from suspicion. No wonder he had not had the envelope it was mailed in; there had been no envelope; he had written the warning himself. While the voice had spoken to me over the televisor it had been his mind that directed it; that was why his lips moved—an unconscious effect of intense concentration. That explained why the voice knew my name, how it knew I was there—knowledge verging on the supernatural by any other explanation. That was why his emissary knew where to find me while I lay asleep—I had telephoned Khalid Bey a few hours before. And now he was gone, with our full permission, with our full cognizance, into his secret retreat in the Sahara.

I cut off the rocket motors as soon as the great yellow beacon from the harbor of Algiers showed I was over the African coast. I wanted no stream of light to warn of my approach. Inland I shot, climbing steeply over the unstable air above the Atlas Mountains; now all was black below me, I was above the limitless wastes of the Sahara. I attended carefully to my position, checking and rechecking. In ten minutes I was swinging in a gigantic circle, auxiliary engines cut, my eyes trying to pierce the darkness below. I was over the spot.

My head shot forward suddenly. A tiny circle of light was there, a diffused effulgence such as might come from beneath the edges of a protected dome. Far, far below it lay, a weak glow-worm of light. I touched my key, flashing its position into space; whatever police operators were listening would pick that up and ships would follow.

I descended straight down toward the position of that glow.

I was not worried now about the noise of my plane. I had remembered that he would be expecting a ship.

I alighted on a roof, a wide roof, the roof of a huge building. It was deserted; a gigantic noise of generators was beneath me, throbbing, pulsating, shaking even the roof beneath my feet. To the left rose the dome; it seemed to be plated with lead. A door in it was ajar, with the carelessness of entire unsuspicion.

I moved quietly toward that door, my gun in my hand. From thirty feet away I could look in, see an entire section of the room. Intricate apparatus was there: coils, electro-magnets, gigantic mushroom-shaped condensers, bulky terminals, Tesla coils, looped cables. I moved gradually until I had scanned the whole room. The apparatus covered all the sides of the dome, converging in the center above two enormous copper balls, below which was a strangely-shaped receptacle, man-sized, armored with cables like

an octopus with a thousand legs. At a long bare table, absorbed in some diagrams before him, sat Khalid Bey.

He was alone. His back was turned. I stepped to the door, stepped inside, swung it shut behind me.

He swung around at the sound. He was looking into the muzzle of my gun.

"So you are Siva the Destroyer," I said.

He sat motionless, his hawk-like head thrust forward, his brilliant eyes unblinking. His face was without expression.

"You are the murderer of Hanishaw and Ferrand," I said.

He said nothing. He was like an image, like an image of one of the bird-headed gods of the Nile. The eyes remained upon me like two cold gems.

"Get up," I said. "If you make a move toward anything I'll kill you."

He rose slowly. The eyes still stayed fixed upon me, glittering, compelling. I went over him quickly. He was unarmed.

I stepped back. "Sit down," I said. "It will do you no good to try to think any of your assistants up here. The door's bolted. You're caught."

The lids dropped over his eyes like two films.

"It is true," he said in a voice entirely without emotion. He sat down. "May I smoke?"

"You admit you did this?" I said.

"I am Siva the Destroyer," he said. He took a cigarette from the box. His movements were calm, almost casual. "What good is it to deny it? If I had thought Van West would have failed I would have killed him before he started. Unfortunately I am not omniscient. You have caught me napping and I am helpless. It is over. I have failed."

I stared at him. "You seem re-

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signed," I said. "Doesn't it affect you that you are facing death?"

"Death?" he said. "Why should it affect me? I am not afraid of death. It is no more unnatural than birth. It means no more to me."

"Why did you do these things?" I said.

He flashed his eyes at me. "I told you this afternoon. A gesture of power."

"A gesture of power! To kill two innocent men, your associates, your friends?"

He shrugged a little. "They were the only two men alive of scientific knowledge and ability approaching mine. Their death was necessary as a preliminary to controlling the world."

"So that was your object!"

"Control of the world," he said, and closed one fist slowly, while his eyes gleamed with a peculiar luminous radiance. It was the first sign of emotion he had shown, that indescribable look. Yet it was not emotion, it was too cold and inhuman. I knew then that the man was mad, with the kind of madness that is more calm and lucid than sanity.

He had masked his eyes again. "Hanishaw and Ferrand knew the secret of chorybdium," he said. "Chorybdium, the invisible metal. We had come on the secret of its composition accidentally, in our efforts to break down the atom." He stopped, and smiled slightly at me, a smile more sinister than his eyes. "Or perhaps you do not care to hear about it?"

"By all means," I said.

"The formula will die with me," he said. "But I will tell you some of its peculiarities. Most metals, most things, have an affinity with the visible end of the spectrum. Chorybdium has an affinity with the invisible end, the ultra and infra rays. It does not reflect what we commonly call light, the visible rays. But its defect is made up by the intensity with which it absorbs the invisible rays. Hence the burns. They are perverted Roentgen ray burns, perverted by the atomic idiosyncrasy of chorybdium; they spread over large superficial areas, and after a time cover enough surface to cause death. I can manage to stave death off for a longer period by a series of insulations on the subject." He nodded slightly toward the octopus-like box. "Long enough for the subject to be of considerable service to me, where otherwise he could not survive for many hours continuous contact with the metal. Two insulations are usually necessary. I destroy an infinitesimal layer of the epidermis, substitute for it . . ."

He stopped suddenly. "Does anything of this interest you?" he asked.

"It all interests me," I said. "It will interest your jury very much."

He was looking at me steadily.

"Does anything of the thought of power interest you?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" I said.

"There are many young men who come to me," he said. "Earnest students, eager seekers after knowledge, anxious for a chance to study under me, to learn in my laboratories. Gullible young men, they are flattered at being chosen as subjects for any experiments of mine. The supply is almost without limit." His voice had lost its casual note. "Let your imagination play with the thought of power. Descending where you will, destroying what you will, taking what you will—money, gold, plunder, anything you desire. Entire nations bending to your will, a subjugation of the earth."

"Are you suggesting that I join in with you in this scheme of yours?" I asked.

He was leaning forward. His eyes flashed now strangely with warmth; they were vivid, persuasive, magnetic. "I am

offering you the chance to be my equal. To be my partner in sharing the earth."

I said: "It could never happen in a thousand years."

"The prospect does not interest you?" he said.

"Not in the slightest," I said grimly. "The only prospect that appeals to me is seeing you brought to dock for your murders."

Again the lids filmed his eyes. "Very well," he said. He shrugged slightly. "There is no use opposing the inevitable." He extended his hands. "I am ready to go with you."

I stepped across and slipped the handcuffs on him. As I did so he turned one hand over; there was a sharp prick in the base of my wrist. I started back with an exclamation; on his face again was that sinister, inscrutable smile.

Instead of a cigarette he had taken from the table a narrow hypodermic syringe!

It was in his hand. I could see it. I could see it, though I did not seem able to move; I tried to raise the gun, to fire it; something heavy as lead and volatile as mercury seemed to be spreading through my veins.

He rose slowly, still smiling, from his chair.

"Morphic ether," he said. "The most powerful anesthetic known to science. Its effects are immediately paralyzing, though the senses dim out more slowly."

Objects in the room seemed to have receded to a plane; his voice came to me as from a distance.

"Now you, Captain Stanage," he said, "will join the company of invisible men."

I tried to cry out, I tried to wheel, to struggle; I was powerless, it was like laboring in a dream. I felt myself fall-

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ing; one of his arms was around me; his face bent over me.

"Two insulations," he said. "After that the armor."

THERE was a space then in which events moved dimly around me and as though hidden by an intervening sightless fog. My mind was crying out the horrible truth; I was to join the ranks of Van West and the others, I was to be his creature, to go out and do unspeakable deeds! And even as I framed the thought my mind was losing itself, dissipating into nothingness, going out into that sightless fog. The sense of touch went last. I felt myself being dragged over the floor, felt myself being lifted, felt the hard surfaces of something enclose me.

I was in the octopus-like box.

Something closed over me.

My last impression of anything in that room was of those enormous copper balls, gleaming, suspended overhead. . . .

I drifted nowhere.

There was a sound as of an infinite turbulent sea churning around me, encompassing me, lashing me, drowning me.

Blackness descended like a sword, riving my mind apart, striking to my soul, plunging me into unfathomable Night.

I seemed to dream.

Fragments of scenes appeared, cities, seas at midnight, storm-beat trees, the spectral radiance of the moon. Faces I had known, faces I had never known, whirling, parading, floating, mingling, vanishing.

Eons seemed to pass.

Pain struck through me in a white flash of agony, unutterable pain, blinding, timeless.

With that pain chaos began around me; formless blooms of things, unnamable floating fantasmagoria, mad whorls of spectra without shape.

Again pain rove me to infinite, unbearable, swooning depths; it was like the sounding of a chord, like monstrous hammer-blows, like the striking of a gigantic clock. It increased, mounted, struck harder, faster; it was intolerable, my flesh could not stand it, it seemed to be behind me, following me. I seemed to be spinning through space, faster, faster, mounting through infinite leagues, whirling, rushing, ascending in a mad curve through void.

Objects in the room appeared vaguely before me, swimming in a dissolving mist.

I heard his voice say: "The first insulation."

My senses were returning. The terrible effects of the insulation had destroyed the power of the drug.

I was no longer in the box. I seemed to be sitting upright; his face was before me. Strength was coming back to me; objects were resuming their natural position.

But my mind was dull, flaccid. It was inert, it lacked volition. It wanted to rest, it did not care what happened.

Something in the bottom of me seemed to say: It is your last chance. It is your last chance before oblivion.

His face leaned closer. Those brilliant baleful eyes were upon me. They fixed mine, they flashed insistently, commandingly, they seemed to plumb my soul.

"You will obey me," said his voice. "You will be my slave, my creature, you will go out to do as I say, you will obey me utterly."

I tried to gather my tired mind together. With every ounce of my strength I strove to resist the force of those eyes.

The hypnosis was commencing. If it succeeded I was doomed.

It was like a struggle on the edge of some giddy precipice. I slid toward it; the eyes flashed, he pressed me; I groped painfully forward; he held me once more, I could do nothing; he overcame me again; I was hanging by my hands; I pulled up; he resisted; we struggled soul to soul, neither gaining; I was tired; I could not hold on; I was slipping back, sliding over, slipping over the brink. . . .

With a tremendous effort I gathered myself together to do something physical. I could not cope with him mentally. It was the last and the utmost effort in my body. It was the ultimate that I could ever do.

I threw my hands forward to seize him by the throat.

It was weak. It was like a child's gesture. He threw my arms aside with a sweep of his hand, but in that instant his attention had shifted. The concentration broke. I plunged forward from the chair, diving at the floor, trying to roll over, to gain time.

With a cry he leaped down to seize me.

Strength was flooding through me, abounding strength, my blood sang with it. I twisted over, swinging my fists, lashing out at him, trying to gain my knees. He leaped back, clubbed me with something, sprang at me to drive me down. He was strong, with the nervous strength of a maniac. But I was strong with the hope of life. I came up under his arm, drove my fist once, twice, into that basilisk face. He cried out, fell back, whirled, broke from me, dove at the table where he had sat.

It was there the narrow syringe lay.

I threw myself after him in a flying dive. I struck his knees as he struck the table. We battled, twisting, smashing, snarling. He got his body half up

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over the table and reached for the hypodermic. I had his wrist. He had the needle in his hand.

If he could turn his hand over . . .

With a cry he threw himself around, gouging with his free hand. A superhuman strength was in him. He raised the hand that held the needle; I still grasped it; he raised it higher; his eyes were like a demon's; he was at the apex of his maniacal strength.

I could see in his eyes the shock of something he saw behind me. Something was at the door.

In that instant of shock I drove his arm back against his shoulder.

There was a crash at the door. Voices cried: "Stanage! Stanage! Where are you?"

His face was suddenly ashen. The eyes were dead. With a desperate wrench he thrust the needle into his shoulder and drove the plunger to the base of the syringe.

Men were in the room.

I did not seem to know they were milling around me, I did not seem to hear their shouts, until the face of one thrust close to mine cried: "Why, it's Khalid Bey!"

I let the inert body slide limply to the floor.

"It is Siva the Destroyer," I said. "And he is dead."

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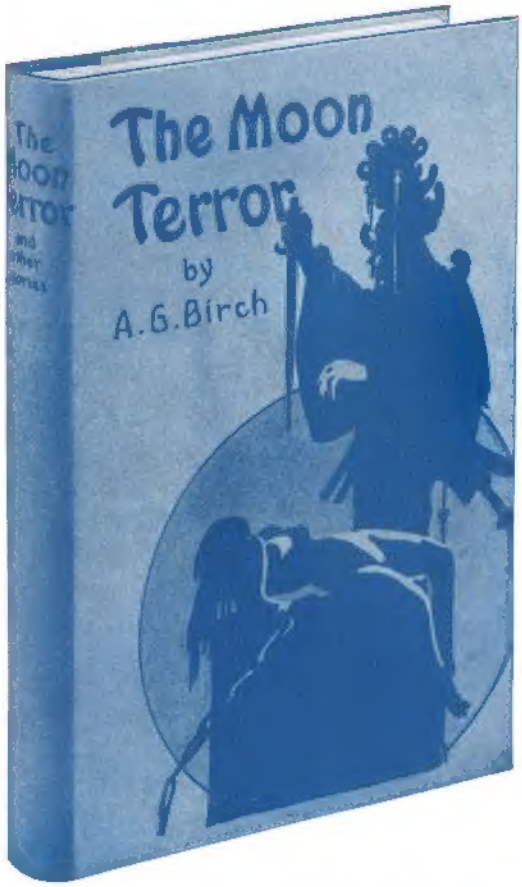

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